

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Digitized by Google

B. Somerset
from G. & E.

Digitized by Google

1419 c. 3771

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

L Beaufort.

A

PRACTICAL VIEW

OF THE

PREVAILING RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

OF

PROFESSED CHRISTIANS,

IN THE

HIGHER AND MIDDLE CLASSES IN THIS COUNTRY,

CONTRASTED WITH

REAL CHRISTIANITY.

By WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, Esq.

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR THE COUNTY OF YORK.

Search the Scriptures!—— JOHN, v. 39.

How charming is DIVINE PHILOSOPHY!
Not harsh, and crabbed, as dull Fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns. MILTON.

THE SIXTH EDITION, CORRECTED.

London:

Printed for T. CADELL, Jun. and W. DAVIES, (Successors to Mr. CADELL) in the Strand.

1798.

1419 e. 3999

Digitized by Google

BODLEIAN
13 MAY 1935
LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION.—*Author's Apology, Design of the Work* - - - 1

CHAP. I. page 7.

Inadequate Conceptions of the Importance of Christianity.

The popular notions concerning the importance of Christianity extremely inadequate - - - - 7 to 14
Religious ignorance criminal - - - - - 14
Unreasonable to expect to become proficients in Christianity without inquiry and pains - - - - 15
Scripture representations of the importance of Christianity - - - 16
The maxim, that it is of no importance what a man believes, exposed - - - - - - - - 20
Also the maxim, that sincerity is all in all - - - 21
True sincerity, what included in it - - - - 24
Concluding reflections - - - - - - 25

CHAP. II. p. 26.

Corruption of Human Nature.

SECT. I.—*Inadequate Conceptions of the Corruption of Human Nature* - - - - - - - - - 26
Popular notions concerning human corruption - - 27

Digitized by Google

The different leſſons on this ſubject which Chriſtianity teaches, proved by the contraſt between what we might expect from man and what we find him in practice 29-43
Firſt, in the moſt poliſhed nations of antiquity - 31
Next, in the inhabitants of the New World on its firſt diſcovery - - - - - - - 33
Next, in the general ſtate of the Chriſtian world - 34
Laſtly, even among true Chriſtians - - - 38
The argument ſummed up and enforced - - - 40
The ſcripture repreſentation of human corruption - 43

SECT. II.—*Evil Spirit.—Natural State of Man* - 45

Exiſtence and agency of the Evil Spirit, though plainly taught in Scripture, generally exploded - - 45
Nothing unreaſonable in this doctrine - - - 46
Scripture repreſentations of the Supreme Being calculated to inſpire awe - - - - - 48
The ſame awful impreſſions excited by the divine threatenings and puniſhments recorded in Scripture, and by the moral order of the world - - - - 49
Chriſtianity breaks in - - - - - 52
Practical importance and uſes of the doctrine of human corruption - - - - - - - 53
Practical advice in relation to this ſubject - - 54

SECT. III.—*Corruption of Human Nature.—Objection* - 56

The objection that our corruption and weakneſs being natural to us, will be excuſed or allowed for, ſtated and conſidered - - - - - - 56
The objection how beſt treated - - - - 57
Fallacy of this objection proved by Scripture - 59-60
Danger of admitting the above objection - - 61
Humility becomes man - - - - 62
Folly of buſying ourſelves with what is above our comprehenſion, and neglect what is plain and practical - 64

CHAP.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III. p. 66.

Chief Defects of the Religious System of the bulk of professed Christians, in what regards our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit— with a Dissertation concerning the Use of the Passions in Religion.

SECT. I. *Inadequate Conceptions concerning our Saviour and the Holy Spirit* - - - - - 66
Leading doctrines concerning Christ and the holy spirit, as stated in Scripture - - - - - - 66
Inadequate conceptions in the above respects charged on the bulk of professed Christians, and enforced - - 68-72
Great ingratitude hereby evinced - - - - - 73
Inadequate notions concerning the Holy Spirit - - 75
Language of one who objects against the religious affections towards our Saviour - - - - - - 76
And against the Holy Spirit's operations - - - 77
Reply to the above; unreasonableness of arguing from the abuse of a thing against its use - - - - 80-2
Religious vulgarity, not to be too much disgusted by it 83-4

SECT. II. *On the Admission of the Passions into Religion* : 85
The opinion that the affections misplaced in religion, discussed and refuted - - - - - 86-101
By the reason of the thing - - - - - 87
By the nature of man - - - - - - 88
By the authority of the scriptures and of scripture characters - - - - - - - - 89-91
True test and measure of the religious affections - 92-4
Religious affections, different according to natural temper, &c. - - - - - - - - 95-6
The affections not merely allowable in religion but highly necessary, proved by analogy - - - - 97-101
Christ the just object of our warm affections - - 102

Digitized by Google

SECT. III.—*Conſideration of the Reaſonableneſs of Affections towards an inviſible Being* - - - - 104

The objection that we are not ſuſceptible of affections towards an inviſible Being, diſcuſſed - - - 104-6

Cloſe contact between ſubject and object, neceſſary to produce affection - - - - 107

And ſufficient to produce affection without ſight 108-10

This explains why public misfortunes affect us leſs than private or perſonal - - - - - 111

Means of ſtrengthening our affection towards any object - - - - - - 112

Special grounds for the affections towards our Saviour 113-14

Divine help promiſed for producing religious affections 115-16

Unreaſonable conduct of objectors in this inſtance 116

Appeal to facts, in proof of the reality of the religious affections.—The martyrs of our own church, and the apoſtles - - - - - - 117-19

Scripture doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit's operations 120-2

SECT. IV.—*Miſtaken Conceptions entertained by nominal Chriſtians of the terms of acceptance with God* - 122

Inference afforded by the inadequate conceptions already noted, that miſtaken conceptions commonly entertained of the means of a ſinner's acceptance with God 122-3

Different degrees of error - - - - 123-4

Nature and proofs of this error - - 126-7

Their fundamental miſconception of the ſcheme and eſſential principle of the Goſpel - - - - 128-9

Practical conſequences and confirmation of the above miſconception - - - - - 129-32

Condemnation of thoſe who abuſe the doctrine of grace 133

Believing in Chriſt, what really implied in it - 134

Anſwer to objection, that we inſiſt on metaphyſical niceties 135-6

The

Digitized by Google

The atonement and grace of Chriſt farther preſſed, as the ſubjects of our habitual regard - - - 136-40
Advantage juſtly taken by the Socinian, of the above defects 138
Practical application and addreſs - - - 142-5

CHAP. IV. p. 146.

On the prevailing inadequate Conceptions concerning the Nature and the Strictneſs of Practical Chriſtianity.

SECT. I. p. 166.

Inadequate conceptions of the practical ſtrictneſs required by Chriſtianity, generally prevalent - - 146-50
Strong preſumption againſt their notions - 150-2
Practical ſtrictneſs of Chriſtianity as ſtated in Scripture 152-4
Eſſential practical characteriſtic of true Chriſtians 154-6
Excellence of this principle - - - 157
The principle farther opened, and ſhewn to include the love of God - - - - - 157-60
The above principle of general application proved by the general terms of Scripture precepts - - 161
Becauſe reſulting from relations common to all Chriſtians 162
Proof, from the ſtrong practical precepts of Scripture 163
From God's requiring the heart - - - 164-5
From the glory of God being preſcribed to us as our great object, and from the criminality of idolatry - 165-7
Extreme importance of the above conſiderations - 167-8

SECT. II. p. 169.

Notions of practical Chriſtianity generally prevalent 169 70
They allow to religion only a partial juriſdiction 171-2
Miſchievous conſequences of the above error - 172-4
The preceding ſtatement confirmed by an appeal to various claſſes of nominal Chriſtians, particularly of the higher order - - - - 174-6

Digitized by Google

To the idle and diſſipated - - - - 176-8
To the votaries of ſenſual pleaſure - - - 178-80
To the votaries of pomp and parade - - - 180
To the votaries of wealth and ambition - - 181
To other claſſes - - - - - 183-4
Concluſion from the preceding review, and general fault in principle of all the above claſſes, that of transferring the heart from God to ſome other maſter - - 184-6
Effects of the fundamental error above-mentioned, on our judgments and practice in the caſe of others - 188
Farther effects, religion degraded into a ſet of ſtatutes, and quibbled away accordingly - - - 190-3
Another effect—Religion placed in external actions, rather than habits of mind - - - - - 195
Yet the internal principle all in all - - - 195-6
As an evil reſulting from the laſt-mentioned error, Chriſtian diſpoſitions are not cultivated - - - - 197
Inſtances of the preceding poſition; the generality forget that the Chriſtian's life is a life of faith, and the true Chriſtian's character in this reſpect - - 198-201
Another diſtinction between nominal and real Chriſtians, grounded on their different taſtes and reliſh for religious ſubjects - - - - - 201-3
Proof drawn from the different manner of their employing the Sunday, and hints on that head - - 203-8
Other internal defects; particularly in meekneſs and humility - - - - - - - - - 210

SECT. III. *On the deſire of human eſtimation and applauſe —The generally prevailing opinions contraſted with thoſe of the true Chriſtian* - - - - 211

Univerſality of the deſire of human eſtimation - 211
Common eulogium of this paſſion, both as to its nature and effects - - - - - - - 212-17
The above vindication queſtioned, even by the Pagan moraliſts - - - - - - 217-18
Eſſentially defective and vicious nature of this paſſion, ſtated and explained in ſcripture - - - 218-20

The

Digitized by Google

The world's commendations naturally misplaced - 221-2
Yet Christians taught in Scripture to cultivate with moderation the good opinion of the world as an instrument of usefulness - - - - - - - 223-4
But points out a higher object of our ambition - 225
The inordinate love of human estimation generally prevalent, and the natural result - - - 226-8
Proofs from various considerations; from the House of Commons - - - - - - 228
From duelling - - - - - 229
Duelling, wherein its essential guilt consists - - 230
A peculiarity in respect of this vice - - 231
Commonly supposed value of the inordinate love of human estimation, questioned and disproved - - 232-3
Reasonings of Christian moralists on this head often bear few traces of Christian morality - - - 234-5
Conduct of the true Christian, in what regards the love of human estimation - - - - 235-44
The most effectual method of moderating this love 245-6
The true Christian guards against it on small no less than on great occasions, in religion, no less than elsewhere 246-50
Parting counsel to those who wish to bring this passion under due regulation; particularly to cultivate love and humility - - - - - 250-4

SECT. IV.—*The generally prevailing error, of substituting amiable tempers and useful lives in the place of religion, stated and confuted; with hints to real Christians* - 256

Amiable tempers and useful lives, their merit commonly exaggerated - - - - - - 256
Stated to be the sum of religion, in substance, if not in name - - - - - - - 257
The distinction between morality and religion fatal 258
The worth of amiable tempers, as estimated by the standard of unassisted reason, commonly over-rated - 259
Many false pretenders to them - - - ib.
Essentially defective nature of amiable tempers, when not grounded in religion - - - - 260

Their

Digitized by Google

Their precarious and ſhort duration - - - 261-4
Worth of uſeful lives, when eſtimated by the ſtandard of unaſſiſted reaſon, over-rated - - - 265
The particular good of them more than countervailed by the general evil - - - - 266
Worth of amiable tempers and uſeful lives, when not grounded in religion, proved to be greatly over-rated, if eſtimated on Chriſtian principles - 267-70
Their nature eſſentially corrupt - - 271-3
The true Chriſtian really the moſt amiable and uſeful character - - - - - - 275
Admonitions to true Chriſtians in the above reſpects - 275
To the naturally ſweet tempered and active - - 276-7
To the naturally auſtere and rough - - 277-82
Amiable tempers and uſeful lives, their juſt praiſe - 282
Apt to be deceived by them in our own caſe - - 284
Danger to true Chriſtians from mixing too much in worldly buſineſs - - - - - 285
Advice to thoſe who ſuſpect this to be their caſe - 286-92
Exquiſite ſenſibility, its flimſy texture; ſchool of Rouſſeau and Sterne - - - - 293
Sterne reprobated for indecency - - - - 294

SECT. V.—*Some other grand defects in the practical ſyſtem of the Bulk of nominal Chriſtians* - - - 295

Inadequate conceptions generally prevalent of the guilt and evil of ſin - - - - - 296
Proofs from our common language - - 298-9
Different ſtandard in the word of God - - 300
Inadequate fear of God generally prevalent - 301
Sin, its baneful nature - - - - 302
The future puniſhments of the wicked repreſented in Scripture as reſulting from eſtabliſhed relations - - 303-4
State of the world at the time of the deluge - 305
Inadequate ſenſe of the difficulty of getting to heaven 306
And of the neceſſity of acquiring a peculiar character in order to fit us for it - - - 307-8

True,

Digitized by Google

True Chriſtian's efforts in this great work - 310
The Chriſtian's life, repreſented under the character of a journey through a ſtrange country - - 311-13
The bulk of nominal Chriſtians defective in the love of God - - - - - 314
Practical excellence of this quality - - 316
The ſtage tried by this teſt - - - 317-19
Our referring the ſtage to this teſt juſtified by political analogy - - - - - - - 320
Bulk of nominal Chriſtians defective in love of their fellow-creatures - - - - 321
True marks of love of our neighbour - - 323-7
The ſtage tried by reference to this teſt - - 329-30

SECT. VI.—*Grand defect.—Neglect of the peculiar Doctrines of Chriſtianity* - - - - 331

Grand defect in the practical ſyſtem of nominal Chriſtians, their neglect of the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity; and practical evils reſulting therefrom, in the caſe of perſons deſirous of repentance and reformation - 331-35
Advice of modern religioniſts to perſons of this deſcription 335
Advice given to them by the Holy Scriptures, and by the church of England - - - - 336-7
Extreme importance of this point; *nature of true holineſs, and Chriſtian method of obtaining it* - - 338-9
Practical uſe made by the true Chriſtian of the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity - - - 340
The ſame uſe of them made in the Scriptures - - 341
Uſe of the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity, in enforcing its importance - - - - - 342
In enforcing an unconditional ſurrender of ourſelves to God - - - - - - - - 343
In enforcing the guilt of ſin, and the dread of its puniſhment - - - - - - - 344
In promoting the love of God - - - - 345-6
In promoting the love of our fellow-creatures - 347

In

Digitized by Google

In promoting humility and meekneſs - - 350
In promoting a ſpirit of moderation in earthly purſuits, and cheerfulneſs in ſuffering - - - 350-3
In promoting courage, confidence in danger, and heavenly mindedneſs - - - - - 353-7
Grand diſtinction between nominal and real Chriſtians, the place practically aſſigned by them to the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity - - - - 357-9

CHAP. V. p. 360.

On the Excellence of Chriſtianity in certain important Particulars. Argument which reſults thence in Proof of its Divine Origin.

Conſiſtency between the leading doctrines, and practical precepts, of Chriſtianity - - - - 361
Between the leading doctrines of Chriſtianity, among each other - - - - - - - ib.
Between the practical precepts of Chriſtianity, among each other - - - - - - - 362-7
Higher value ſet by Chriſtianity on moral, than on intellectual, attainments - - - - - 367-71
Intrinſic excellence of the practical precepts of Chriſtianity - - - - - - - 371
Strong evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, afforded by the number and variety of the kinds of evidence by which its divine origin is proved - - - 372-4

CHAP. VI. p. 375.

Brief Inquiry into the preſent State of Chriſtianity in this Country, with ſome of the Cauſes which have led to its critical Circumſtances.

Its

Digitized by Google

Its Importance to us as a political Community, and practical Hints for which the foregoing Conſiderations give occaſion.

Tendency of Religion, and eſpecially of Chriſtianity, to promote the well-being of political communities - 375-6
A general ſtandard or tone of moral practice, in every community - - - - - - - - 377-8
Chriſtianity has raiſed this general ſtandard or tone - 378
Effects on religion, of adverſity and proſperity reſpectively 380
Natural preſumption concerning the preſent ſtate of religion among us, afforded by the preceding conſideration 381-4
Cauſes from which the peculiarities of Chriſtianity ſlide into diſuſe - - - - - - - 384-5
Still farther decline to be expected - - 386-7
The above preſumptive ſtatements juſtified by facts 387-9
One cauſe aſſigned which has principally operated in reducing Chriſtianity among us to a mere ſyſtem of ethics 389
Chriſtianity, ſuch as it is, ſtated in the preſent work, the religion of the pillars of our church - - 390
Its corruption accelerated by the civil commotions of the laſt century - - - - - - 391-2
The peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity, at length almoſt left out of the ſyſtem: this poſition confirmed by an appeal to our beſt novels - - - - - 394-6
The literati of our days, ſceptically diſpoſed - 396-8
Conſequences to be expected - - - 398
The objection, that the author's ſyſtem ſo ſtrict, that if it were to prevail the world could not go on, ſtated and refuted - - - - - - - 399-403
Happy effects to us as a political community, from the prevalence of *vital Chriſtianity* - - - - 403-5
The poſition that Chriſtianity is hoſtile to patriotiſm, oppoſed - - - - 406
Superior nature and extent of true Chriſtian benevolence 407-8

Chriſtianity

Digitized by Google

Chriſtianity peculiarly adapted to promote the well-being of political communities, from its hoſtility to ſelfiſhneſs 409-11
Political expedients for preventing the miſchievous effects of ſelfiſhneſs on civil communities, and ſuperior efficacy of Chriſtianity in this reſpect - - - 411-16
Means by which Chriſtianity produces the above effect 414-16
Vital Chriſtianity can alone produce them - 416
In the preſent circumſtances of this country, we muſt either have vital Chriſtianity, or we ſhall have none at all 416-19
Appeal to experience in confirmation of the above poſition 420
Political good effects from the revival of vital Chriſtianity among us, and bad ones from its farther decline 421-3
A ſtate of great civilization, no ſecurity againſt great moral corruption - - - - - - 424-5
Practical hints for the conduct of men in power, ſuggeſted by the above ſtatements - - - - 426
No time for half meaſures.—A decided line of conduct called for - - - - - - 427-8
Duty enforced on us, of checking open profaneneſs, and, above all, of giving religious inſtruction to the riſing generation - - - - - - 429
Evangelical Chriſtianity alone likely to produce any real amendment - - - - - 429-30
The above remark preſſed on the biſhops, the clergy, and our univerſities - - - - 430-1
Apology for having treated of religion ſo much with a view to its political effects - - - 432-3

CHAP. VII. p. 434.

Practical Hints to various Deſcriptions of Perſons.

The common ſort of Chriſtianity does not deſerve the name 434-5
Some conſiderations preparatory to ſelf-examination; one of them peculiarly awful - - - 435-7

Cauſes

Digitized by Google

Causes of self-deception suggested - - - 437
One cause of self-deception, the mistaking our merely outgrowing or changing our vices, for forsaking all sin; appeal to life - - - - - - 438-42
Charge of being uncharitable repelled, and what really charity and uncharitableness - - - 443-4
Women naturally more disposed to religion than men; domestic advantages therefrom - - 445-7
Innocent young people, the term how much abused 447-9
The reformation held sufficient by the world, how much it falls short of true Christian regeneration - 449-52
Practical hints to such as having hitherto been careless and irreligious, wish to become true Christians - 452-6
Excellent nature and practical benefits of humility 457-8
Love enforced - - - - - - - 459
Base and mercenary nature of the religion of the bulk of nominal Christians, and opposite character of true Christianity - - - - - - - - 460-3
The charge repelled, that we render Christianity a gloomy service - - - - - - - - 464
Multiplied sources of pleasure to true Christians - 465-9
Superior situation of true Christians over men of the world, in point of comfort, especially in our days - 469-72

SECT. II.—*Advice to some who profess their full Assent to the fundamental Doctrines of the Gospel* - - 472
A loose way of holding the true doctrines of Christianity, too generally prevalent in our relaxed days - 472-5
Its danger and mischievous effects - - 475-6
Watchfulness and diligence enforced; and the study of the lives of eminent Christians recommended - 476-7

SECT. III. *Brief Observations addressed to Sceptics and Unitarians* - - - - 478
Presumption in favour of the truth of Christianity, from the greatest and wisest men having embraced it 478-9
Infidelity gradually growing on young men as they advance in years - - - - 479-80

The

Digitized by Google

The above *natural history* of ſcepticiſm confirmed by experience, and by the written lives of ſceptics - 482-3
Infidelity, a diſeaſe of the heart rather than of the underſtanding - - - - - 483-5
Unitarianiſm often reſorted to, from a wiſh to eſcape from the ſtrictneſs of Chriſtianity - - 486-7
Deiſts and Unitarians, have poſſeſſed a great advantage in contendng with the orthodox Chriſtian, from being the aſſailants; practical hint which this ſuggeſts - 488-90
Half unbelievers; their ſyſtem peculiarly irrational and criminal - - - - - - 490-2
Increaſing evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity 491-2
Unbelievers muſt ſtand the iſſue - - 493

SECT. IV. *Advice ſuggeſted by the ſtate of the times to true Chriſtians* - - - - 495

Real Chriſtians peculiarly bound to exert themſelves in the preſent times - - - - - 495-8
Bound in particular to be earneſt in prayer for their country 498-9
Avowal of the Author, *that to the decline of religion, he chiefly aſcribes our national misfortunes, and that his beſt hopes are grounded on the perſuaſion, that we have among us many real Chriſtians* - - - 500
Motives which have powerfully prompted the author to the proſecution of the preſent work - - - 500-2

Digitized by Google

INTRODUCTION.

IT has been, for ſeveral years, the earneſt wiſh of the writer of the following pages to addreſs his countrymen on the important ſubject of Religion; but the various duties of his public ſtation, and a conſtitution incapable of much labour, have obſtructed the execution of his purpoſe. Long has he been looking forward to ſome vacant ſeaſon, in which he might devote his whole time and attention to this intereſting ſervice, free from the interruption of all other concerns; and he has the rather wiſhed for this opportunity of undiſtracted reflection, from a deſire that what he might ſend into the world might thus be rendered leſs undeſerving of the public eye. Meanwhile life is wearing away, and he daily becomes more and more convinced, that he might wait in vain for this ſeaſon of compleat vacancy. He muſt be content, therefore, to improve ſuch occaſional intervals of leiſure

Digitized by Google

as may occur to him in the courſe of an active and buſy life, and to throw himſelf on the Reader's indulgence for the pardon of ſuch imperfections, as the opportunity of undiverted attention and maturer reflections might have enabled him to diſcover and correct.

But the plea here ſuggeſted is by no means intended as an excuſe for the opinions which he ſhall expreſs, if they be found miſtaken. Here, if he be in an error, he freely acknowledges it to be a deliberate error. He would indeed account himſelf unpardonable were he to obtrude upon the public his firſt crude thoughts on a ſubject of ſuch vaſt importance; and he can truly declare, that what he ſhall offer is the reſult of cloſe obſervation, ſerious inquiry, much reading, and long and repeated conſideration.

It is not improbable that he may be accuſed of deviating from his proper line, and of impertinently interfering in the concerns of a Profeſſion to which he does not belong. If it were neceſſary, however, to defend himſelf againſt this charge, he might ſhelter himſelf under the authority of many moſt reſpectable examples. But

Digitized by Google

But to ſuch an accuſation ſurely it may be ſufficient to reply, that it is the duty of every man to promote the happineſs of his fellow-creatures to the utmoſt of his power; and that he who thinks he ſees many around him, whom he eſteems and loves, labouring under a fatal error, muſt have a cold heart, or a moſt confined notion of benevolence, if he could withhold his endeavours to ſet them right, from an apprehenſion of incurring the imputation of officiouſneſs.

But he might alſo allege, as a full juſtification, not only that Religion is the buſineſs of every one, but that its advancement or decline in any country is ſo intimately connected with the temporal intereſts of ſociety, as to render it the peculiar concern of a political man; and that what he may preſume to offer on the ſubject of Religion may perhaps be peruſed with leſs jealouſy and more candour, from the very circumſtance of its having been written by a Layman, which muſt at leaſt exclude the idea (an idea ſometimes illiberally ſuggeſted to take off the effect of the works of Eccleſiaſtics) that it is prompted by motives of ſelf-intereſt, or of profeſſional prejudice.

Digitized by Google

BUT if the writer's apology ſhould not be found in the work itſelf, and in his avowed motive for undertaking it; in vain would he endeavour to ſatisfy his readers by any excuſes which he might allege: he will therefore proceed, without farther preamble, to lay before them a general ſtatement of his deſign.

THE main object which he has in view is, not to convince the Sceptic, or to anſwer the arguments of perſons who avowedly oppoſe the fundamental doctrines of our Religion; but to point out the ſcanty and erroneous ſyſtem of the bulk of thoſe who belong to the claſs of orthodox Chriſtians, and to contraſt their defective ſcheme with a repreſentation of what the author apprehends to be real Chriſtianity. Often has it filled him with deep concern, to obſerve in this deſcription of perſons, ſcarcely any diſtinct knowledge of the real nature and principles of the Religion which they profeſs. The ſubject is of infinite importance; let it not be driven out of our minds by the buſtle or diſſipations of life. This preſent ſcene, with all its cares and all its gaieties, will ſoon be rolled away, and "we muſt ſtand before the judgement-ſeat of Chriſt." This aweful conſideration

Digitized by Google

ſideration will prompt the writer to expreſs himſelf with greater freedom than he ſhould otherwiſe be diſpoſed to uſe. And he truſts that this conſideration, while it juſtifies his frankneſs, will ſecure to him a ſerious and patient peruſal.

But it would be treſpaſſing on the indulgence of the reader to detain him with introductory remarks. Let it only be further premiſed, that if what ſhall be ſtated ſhould to any appear needleſsly auſtere and rigid, the writer muſt lay in his claim not to be condemned, without a fair inquiry whether his ſtatements do or do not accord with the language of the ſacred writings. To that teſt he refers with confidence. And it muſt be conceded by thoſe who admit the authority of Scripture, that from the deciſion of the word of God there can be no appeal.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I.

INADEQUATE CONCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

Popular Notions.—Scripture Account.—Ignorance in this Caſe criminal.—Two falſe Maxims expoſed.

Popular Notions.

BEFORE we proceed to the conſideration of any particular defects in the religious ſyſtem of the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians, it may be proper to point out the very inadequate conception which they entertain of the importance of Chriſtianity in general, of its peculiar nature, and ſuperior excellence. If we liſten to their converſation, virtue is praiſed, and vice is cenſured; piety is perhaps applauded, and profaneneſs condemned. So far all is well. But let any one, who would not be deceived by theſe "barren generalities," examine a little more cloſely, and he will find, that not to Chriſtianity in particular, but at beſt to Religion in general, perhaps to mere Morality, their homage is intended to be paid. With Chriſtianity, as diſtinct from theſe, they are little acquainted; their

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

views of it have been so cursory and superficial, that far from discerning its peculiar characteristics, they have little more than perceived those exterior circumstances which distinguish it from other forms of Religion. There are some few facts, and perhaps some leading doctrines and principles, of which they cannot be wholly ignorant; but of the consequences, and relations, and practical uses of these, they have few ideas, or none at all.

Does this language seem too strong? View their plan of life and their ordinary conduct; and let us ask, wherein can we discern the points of discrimination between them and professed unbelievers? In an age wherein it is confessed and lamented that infidelity abounds, do we observe in them any remarkable care to instruct their children in the principles of the faith which they profess, and to furnish them with arguments for the defence of it? They would blush, on their child's coming out into the world, to think him defective in any branch of that knowledge, or of those accomplishments, which belong to his station in life; and accordingly these are cultivated with becoming assiduity. But he is left to collect his religion as he may; the study of Christianity has formed no part of

Digitized by Google

of his education; and his attachment to it (where any attachment to it exiſts at all) is, too often, not the preference of ſober reaſon and conviction, but merely the reſult of early and groundleſs prepoſſeſſion. He was born in a Chriſtian country; of courſe he is a Chriſtian: his father was a member of the church of England; ſo is he. When ſuch is the religion handed down among us by hereditary ſucceſſion, it cannot ſurpriſe us to obſerve young men of ſenſe and ſpirit beginning to doubt altogether of the truth of the ſyſtem in which they have been brought up, and ready to abandon a ſtation which they are unable to defend. Knowing Chriſtianity chiefly in the difficulties which it contains, and in the impoſſibilities which are falſely imputed to it, they fall perhaps into the company of infidels; where they are ſhaken by frivolous objections and profane cavils, which, had their religious perſuaſion been grounded in reaſon and argument, would have paſſed by them "as the idle wind."

LET us beware before it be too late. No one can ſay into what diſcredit Chriſtianity may hereby grow, at a time when the unreſtrained intercourſe, ſubſiſting among the ſeveral ranks and claſſes of ſociety, ſo much favours

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

favours the general diffuſion of the ſentiments of the higher orders. To a ſimilar ignorance may perhaps be aſcribed, in no ſmall degree, the ſucceſs with which, in a neighbouring country, Chriſtianity has of late years been attacked. Had ſhe not been wholly unarmed for the conteſt, however ſhe might have been forced from her untenable poſts, and compelled to diſembarraſs herſelf from her load of incumbrances, ſhe never could have been driven altogether out of the field by her puny aſſailants, with all their cavils, and gibes, and ſarcaſms; for in theſe conſiſted the main ſtrength of their petty artillery. Let us beware, leſt we alſo ſuffer from a like cauſe; nor let it be our crime and our reproach, that in ſchools, perhaps even in Colleges, Chriſtianity is almoſt if not altogether neglected.

It cannot be expected, that they who are ſo little attentive to this great object in the education of their children, ſhould be more ſo in other parts of their conduct, where leſs ſtrongly ſtimulated by affection, and leſs obviouſly loaded with reſponſibility. They are of courſe, therefore, little regardful of the ſtate of Chriſtianity in their own country; and ſtill more indifferent about communicating

Digitized by Google

eating the light of divine truth to the nations which "ſtill ſit in darkneſs." CHAP. I.

BUT Religion, it may be replied, is not noiſy and oſtentatious; it is modeſt and private in its nature; it reſides in a man's own boſom, and ſhuns the obſervation of the multitude. Be it ſo,

FROM the tranſient and diſtant view then, which we have been taking of theſe unaſſuming Chriſtians, let us approach a little nearer, and liſten to the unreſerved converſation of their confidential hours. Here, if any where, the interior of the heart is laid open, and we may aſcertain the true principles of their regards and averſions; the ſcale by which they meaſure the good and evil of life. Here, however, you will diſcover few or no traces of Chriſtianity. She ſcarcely finds herſelf a place amidſt the many objects of their hopes, and fears, and joys, and ſorrows. Grateful, perhaps, (as well indeed they may be grateful) for health, and talents, and affluence, and other temporal poſſeſſions, they ſcarcely reckon in the number of their bleſſings this grand diſtinguiſhing mark of the bounty of Providence. Or if they mention it at all, it is noticed coldly and formally,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

mally, like one of thoſe obſolete claims to which, though but of ſmall account in the eſtimate of our wealth or power, we think it as well to put in our title from conſiderations of family decorum or of national uſage.

But what more than all the reſt eſtabliſhes the point in queſtion: let their converſation take a graver turn. Here at length their religion, modeſt and retired as it is, muſt be expected to diſcloſe itſelf: here however you will look in vain for the religion of Jeſus. Their ſtandard of right and wrong is not the ſtandard of the goſpel: they approve and condemn by a different rule: they advance principles and maintain opinions altogether oppoſite to the genius and character of Chriſtianity. You would fancy yourſelf rather among the followers of the old ſchools of philoſophy: nor is it eaſy to gueſs how any one could ſatisfy himſelf to the contrary, unleſs, by mentioning the name of ſome acknowledged heretic, he ſhould afford them an occaſion of demonſtrating their zeal for the religion of their country.

The truth is, their opinions on the ſubject of religion are not formed from the peruſal of

Digitized by Google

of the word of God. The Bible lies on the ſhelf unopened: and they would be wholly ignorant of its contents, except for what they hear occaſionally at church, or for the faint traces which their memories may ſtill retain of the leſſons of their earlieſt infancy.

How different, nay, in many reſpects, how contradictory, would be the two ſyſtems of mere morals, of which the one ſhould be formed from the commonly received maxims of the Chriſtian world, and the other from the ſtudy of the Holy Scriptures! It would be curious to remark in any one, who had hitherto ſatisfied himſelf with the former, the aſtoniſhment which would be excited on his firſt introduction to the latter. We are not left here to bare conjecture. This was, in fact, the effect produced on the mind of a late ingenious writer *, of whoſe little work, though it bear ſome marks of his cuſtomary love of paradox, we muſt at leaſt confeſs, that it expoſes, in a ſtrong point of view, the *poverty* of that ſuperficial religion which prevails in our day; and that it throughout diſplays that happy perſpicuity, and grace, which ſo eminently characterize the compo-

* It is almoſt ſuperfluous to name Mr. SOAME JENYNS.

ſitions

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

ſitions of its author. But after this willing tribute of commendation, we are reluctantly compelled to remark, that the work in queſtion diſcredits the cauſe which it was meant to ſerve, by many crude and extravagant poſitions; a defect from which no one can be ſecure who forms a haſty judgement of a deep and comprehenſive ſubject, the ſeveral relations of which have been imperfectly ſurveyed; and above all, it muſt be lamented, that it treats the great queſtion which it profeſſes to diſcuſs, rather as a matter of mere ſpeculation, than as one wherein our everlaſting intereſts are involved. Surely the writer's object ſhould have been, to convince his readers of their guilt ſtill more than of their ignorance, and to leave them impreſſed rather with a ſenſe of their danger than of their folly.

It were needleſs to multiply arguments in order to prove how criminal the voluntary ignorance, of which we have been ſpeaking, muſt appear in the ſight of God. It muſt be confeſſed by all who believe that we are accountable creatures, and to ſuch only the writer is addreſſing himſelf, that we ſhall have to anſwer hereafter to the Almighty for all the means we have here enjoyed of improving

Digitized by Google

improving ourſelves, or of promoting the happineſs of others. If, when ſummoned to give an account of our ſtewardſhip, we ſhall be called upon to anſwer for the uſe which we have made of our bodily organs, and of our means of relieving the wants of our fellow creatures; how much more for the exerciſe of the nobler faculties of our nature, of invention, memory, judgement, and opportunity, for our employment of every inſtrument of diligent application, and ſerious reflection, and honeſt deciſion. And to what ſubject might we in all reaſon be expected to apply more earneſtly, than to that wherein our own eternal intereſts are at iſſue? When God of his goodneſs hath vouchſafed to grant us ſuch abundant means of inſtruction, in that which we are moſt concerned to know, how great muſt be the guilt, and how aweful the puniſhment of voluntary ignorance!

And why are we in this purſuit alone to expect knowledge without inquiry, and ſucceſs without endeavour? The whole analogy of nature inculcates a different leſſon, and our own judgements in matters of temporal intereſt and worldly policy confirm the truth of her ſuggeſtions. Bountiful as is the hand

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

of Providence, its gifts are not ſo beſtowed as to ſeduce us into indolence; but to rouſe us to exertion; and no one expects to attain to the height of learning, or arts, or power, or wealth, or military glory, without vigorous reſolution, and ſtrenuous diligence, and ſteady perſeverance. Yet we expect to be Chriſtians without labour, ſtudy, or inquiry. This is the more prepoſterous, becauſe Chriſtianity, being a revelation from God, and not the invention of man, diſcovering to us new relations, with their correſpondent duties; containing alſo doctrines, motives, and precepts, peculiar to itſelf; we cannot reaſonably expect to become proficients in it by the accidental intercourſes of life, as one might learn inſenſibly the maxims of worldly policy, or a ſcheme of mere morals.

Scripture Account.

THE diligent peruſal of the Holy Scriptures would diſcover to us our paſt ignorance. We ſhould ceaſe to be deceived by ſuperficial appearances, and to confound the Goſpel of Chriſt with the ſyſtems of philoſophers; we ſhould become impreſſed with the weighty truth, ſo much forgotten in the preſent day, that Chriſtianity calls on us, as we value our immortal ſouls, not merely in *general*, to be *religious* and *moral*, but *ſpecially* to believe the

Digitized by Google

the doctrines, imbibe the principles, and practiſe the precepts of Chriſt. It might be to run into too great length to confirm this poſition beyond diſpute by expreſs quotations from the word of God. And (not to anticipate what belongs more properly to a ſubſequent part of the work) it may be ſufficient here to remark in general, that Chriſtianity is always repreſented in Scripture as the grand, the unparalleled inſtance of God's bounty to mankind. This unſpeakable gift was graciouſly held forth in the original promiſe to our firſt parents: it was predicted by a long continued ſeries of prophets; the ſubject of their prayers, inquiries, and longing expectations. In a world which oppoſed and perſecuted them, it was their ſource of peace, and hope, and conſolation. At length it approached—the Deſire of all Nations—The long expected Star announced its preſence—A multitude of the heavenly hoſt hailed its introduction, and proclaimed its character; "Glory to God in the higheſt, on earth "peace, good will towards men." The Goſpel is every where repreſented in ſcripture by ſuch figures as are moſt ſtrongly calculated to impreſs on our minds a ſenſe of its value; it is ſpoken of as light from darkneſs, as releaſe from priſon, as deliverance from

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

captivity, as life from death. "Lord, now "letteſt thou thy ſervant depart in peace, "for mine eyes have ſeen thy ſalvation," was the exclamation with which it was welcomed by the pious Simeon; and it was univerſally received among the early converts with thankfulneſs and joy. At one time, the communication of it is promiſed as a reward; at another, the loſs of it is threatened as a puniſhment. And, ſhort as is the form of prayer taught us by our bleſſed Saviour, the more general extenſion of the kingdom of Chriſt conſtitutes one of its leading petitions.

WITH what exalted conceptions of the importance of Chriſtianity ought we to be filled by ſuch deſcriptions as theſe? Yet, in vain have we "line upon line and precept upon "precept."—Thus predicted, thus prayed and longed for, thus announced, characterized, and rejoiced in, this heavenly treaſure poured into our lap in rich abundance we ſcarce accept. We turn from it coldly, or at beſt poſſeſs it negligently, as a thing of no eſtimation. But a due ſenſe of its value would aſſuredly be impreſſed on us by the diligent ſtudy of the word of God, that bleſſed repoſitory of heavenly truth and conſolation.

Digitized by Google

tion. Thence it is that we are to learn what we ought to believe and what to practiſe. And, ſurely, one would think that much importunity would not be requiſite to induce men to a peruſal of the ſacred volume. Reaſon dictates, Revelation commands; "Faith comes by hearing, and hear-"ing by the word of God."—"Search the "Scriptures,"—"Be ready to give to every "one a reaſon of the hope that is in you." Such are the declarations and injunctions of the inſpired writers; injunctions confirmed by commendations of thoſe who obey the admonition. Yet, is it not undeniable that with the Bible in our houſes, we are ignorant of its contents; and that hence, in a great meaſure, it ariſes, that the bulk of the Chriſtian world know ſo little, and miſtake ſo greatly, in what regards the religion which they profeſs?

CHAP. I.

THIS is not the place for inquiring at large, whence it is that thoſe who aſſent to the poſition, that the Bible is the word of God, and who profeſs to reſt their hopes on the Chriſtian baſis, contentedly acquieſce in a ſtate of ſuch lamentable ignorance. But it may not be improper here to touch on two kindred opinions; from which, in the minds

Two falſe maxims expoſed.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

of the more thoughtful and ſerious, this acquieſcence appears to derive much ſecret ſupport. The one is, that *it ſignifies little what a man believes; look to his practice.* The other (of the ſame family) *that ſincerity is all in all.* Let a man's opinions and conduct be what they may, yet, provided he be ſincerely convinced that they are right, however the exigencies of civil ſociety may require him to be dealt with among men, in the ſight of God he cannot be criminal.

It would detain us too long, fully to ſet forth the various merits of theſe favourite poſitions, of which it is ſurely not the ſmalleſt excellence, that they are of unbounded application, comprehending within their capacious limits all the errors which have been believed, and many of the moſt deſperate crimes which have been perpetrated among men. Of the former of theſe maxims, we may remark, that it proceeds on the monſtrous ſuppoſition already noticed, that although accountable creatures, we ſhall not be called to account for the exerciſe of our intellectual and mental powers. Moreover, it is founded on that groſsly fallacious aſſumption, that a man's opinions will not influence his practice. The advocates of this faſhionable

Digitized by Google

faſhionable principle require to be reminded, that the judgement often receives a corrupt bias from the heart and the affections; that vice is the fruitful mother of prejudice and error. Forgetful of theſe acknowledged truths, and confounding the moſt important moral diſtinctions, they place on the ſame level thoſe who, carefully weeding from their hearts every falſe principle, occupy themſelves in a ſincere and warm purſuit of truth, and thoſe who yield themſelves implicitly to the opinions, whatever they may be, which early prepoſſeſſion may have infuſed, or which paſſion or intereſt, or even acquieſcing indolence may have impoſed upon their minds.

THE latter of the foregoing maxims, that Sincerity is all in all, proceeds on this groundleſs ſuppoſition, that the Supreme Being has not afforded us ſufficient means of diſcriminating truth from falſehood, right from wrong: and it implies, that be a man's opinions or conduct ever ſo wild and extravagant, we are to preſume, that they are as much the reſult of impartial inquiry and honeſt conviction, as if his ſentiments and actions had been ſtrictly conformable to the rules of reaſon and ſobriety. Never indeed

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

was there a principle more general in its uſe, more ſovereign in its potency. How does its beautiful ſimplicity alſo, and compendious brevity, give it rank before the laborious ſubtleties of Bellarmin! Clement, and Ravaillac, and other worthies of a ſimilar ſtamp, from whoſe purity of intention the world has hitherto withheld its due tribute of applauſe, would here have found a ready plea; and their injured innocence ſhall now at length receive its full though tardy vindication. "Theſe however," it may be replied, "are excepted caſes." Certainly they are caſes of which, becauſe they clearly expoſe the unſoundneſs of his principle, any one who maintains the opinion in queſtion would be glad to diſencumber himſelf. But it will be incumbent on ſuch an one, firſt to explain with preciſion why they are to be exempted from its operation, and this he will find an impoſſible taſk; for *ſincerity*, in its popular ſenſe, cannot be made the criterion of guilt and innocence on any ground, which will not equally ſerve to juſtify the aſſaſſins who have been inſtanced. The concluſion cannot be eluded; no man was ever more fully perſuaded of the innocence of any action, than thoſe men were convinced, that the horrid deed they were about to perpetrate

Digitized by Google

petrate was not merely lawful, but highly meritorious. Thus Clement and Ravaillac being unqueſtionably ſincere, they were therefore indubitably innocent. Nay, the abſurd and pernicious tendency of this principle might be ſhewn to be even greater than what has yet been ſtated. It would ſcarcely be going too far to aſſert, that whilſt it ſcorns the defence of petty villains, of thoſe who ſtill retain the ſenſe of good and evil, it holds forth, like ſome well frequented ſanctuary, a ſecure aſylum to thoſe more finiſhed criminals, who, from long habits of wickedneſs, are loſt alike to the perception as to the practice of virtue; and that it ſelects a ſeared conſcience, and a heart become callous to all moral diſtinctions, as the ſpecial objects of its care. Nor is it only in prophane hiſtory, that inſtances are to be found like thoſe which we have mentioned, of perſons committing the greateſt crimes with a ſincere conviction of the rectitude of their conduct. Scripture will afford us parallels; and it was ſurely to guard us againſt the very error which we have been now expoſing, that our bleſſed Saviour forewarned his diſciples: "The "time cometh, that whoſoever killeth you "will think that he doeth God ſervice."

Digitized by Google

CHAP. I.

True Sincerity.

A PRINCIPLE like this must then be abandoned, and the advocates for sincerity must be compelled to restore this abused term to its genuine signification, and to acknowledge that it must imply honesty of mind, a faithful use of the means of knowledge and improvement, a desire of being instructed, humble inquiry, impartial consideration, and unprejudiced judgement. It is to these we would earnestly call you; and to such dispositions of mind, ever to be accompanied with fervent prayer for the divine blessing, Scripture every where holds forth the most animating promises. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and "ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; Ho! every one that thirsteth, "come ye to the waters;" such are the comfortable assurances, such the gracious encouragements to the truly sincere inquirer. How deep will be our guilt if we slight all these benevolent offers "How many prophets "and kings have desired to hear the things "that we hear, and have not heard them!" Great indeed are our opportunities, great also is our responsibility. Let us awaken to a true sense of our situation. Every consideration is presented to us that can alarm our fears, or animate our industry. How soon may the brightness of our meridian sun be darkened!

Digitized by Google

darkened! Or, ſhould the long ſuffering of God ſtill continue to us the mercies which we ſo much abuſe, this will only aggravate our crime, and in the end enhance our puniſhment. The time of reckoning will at length arriye. And when finally ſummoned to the bar of God, to give an account of our ſtewardſhip, what plea can we have to urge in our defence, if we remain willingly and obſtinately ignorant of the way which leads to life, with ſuch tranſcendent means of knowing it, and ſuch urgent motives to its purſuit?

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE.

SECT. I.

Inadequate Conceptions of the Corruption of Human Nature.

CHAP. II. Popular notions.

AFTER conſidering the defective notions of the importance of Chriſtianity *in general*, which prevail among the higher orders of profeſſed Chriſtians, the particular miſconceptions which firſt come under our notice reſpect the corruption and weakneſs of human nature. This is a topic on which it is poſſible that many into whoſe hands the preſent work ſhall fall, may not have beſtowed much attention. If the caſe be ſo, it may be requiſite to intreat them to lend a patient and a ſerious ear. The ſubject is of the deepeſt import. Nor are we afraid of going too far when we aſſert, that it lies at the very root of all true Religion, and is eminently the baſis and ground-work of Chriſtianity.

So far as the writer has had an opportunity of remarking, the generality of profeſſed Chriſtians

Digitized by Google

Chriſtians among the higher claſſes, either altogether overlook or deny, or at leaſt greatly extenuate the corruption and weakneſs here in queſtion. They acknowledge indeed that there is, and ever has been in the world, a great portion of vice and wickedneſs; that mankind have been ever prone to ſenſuality and ſelfiſhneſs, in diſobedience to the more refined and liberal principles of their nature; that in all ages and countries, in public and in private life, innumerable inſtances have been afforded of oppreſſion, of rapacity, of cruelty, of fraud, of envy, and of malice. They own that it is too often in vain that you inform the underſtanding, and convince the judgement. They admit that you do not thereby reform the hearts of men. Though they *know* their duty, they will not practiſe it; no not even when you have forced them to acknowledge that the path of virtue is alſo that of real intereſt, and of ſolid enjoyment.

Theſe facts are certain; they cannot be diſputed; and they are at the ſame time ſo obvious, that one would have thought the celebrated apophthegm of the Grecian ſage, "the majority are wicked," would ſcarcely have

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

have eſtabliſhed his claim to intellectual ſuperiority.

But though theſe effects of human depravity are every where acknowledged and lamented, we muſt not expect to find them traced to their true origin.

Cauſa latet, vis eſt notiſſima.

Prepare yourſelf to hear rather of frailty and infirmity, of petty tranſgreſſions, of occaſional failings, of ſudden ſurpriſals, and of ſuch other qualifying terms as may ſerve to keep out of view the true ſource of the evil, and, without ſhocking the underſtanding, may adminiſter conſolation to the pride of human nature. The bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians are uſed to ſpeak of man as of a being, who, naturally pure, and inclined to all virtue, is ſometimes, almoſt involuntarily, drawn out of the right courſe, or is overpowered by the violence of temptation. Vice with them is rather an accidental and temporary, than a conſtitutional and habitual diſtemper; a noxious plant, which, though found to live and even to thrive in the human mind, is not the natural growth and production of the ſoil.

True account proved from Reaſon and Scripture.

Far different is the humiliating language of Chriſtianity. From it we learn that man is

Digitized by Google

is an apoſtate creature, fallen from his high original, degraded in his nature, and depraved in his faculties; indiſpoſed to good, and diſpoſed to evil; prone to vice, it is natural and eaſy to him; diſinclined to virtue, it is difficult and laborious; that he is tainted with ſin, not ſlightly and ſuperficially, but radically and to the very core. Theſe are truths which, however mortifying to our pride, one would think (if this very corruption itſelf did not warp the judgement) none would be hardy enough to attempt to controvert. I know nothing which brings them home ſo forcibly to my own feelings, as the conſideration of what ſtill remains to us of our primitive dignity, when contraſted with our preſent ſtate of moral degradation,

"Into what depth thou ſeeſt,
"From what height fallen."

EXAMINE firſt with attention the natural powers and faculties of man; invention, reaſon, judgement, memory; a mind "of "large diſcourſe," "looking before and "after," reviewing the paſt, thence determining for the preſent, and anticipating the future; diſcerning, collecting, combining, comparing; capable not merely of apprehending but of admiring the beauty of moral excellence:

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

excellence: with fear and hope to warn and animate; with joy and ſorrow to ſolace and ſoften; with love to attach, with ſympathy to harmonize, with courage to attempt, with patience to endure, and with the power of conſcience, that faithful monitor within the breaſt, to enforce the concluſions of reaſon, and direct and regulate the paſſions of the ſoul. Truly we muſt pronounce him "ma-"jeſtic though in ruin." "Happy, happy "world," would be the exclamation of the inhabitant of ſome other planet, on being told of a globe like ours, peopled with ſuch creatures as theſe, and abounding with ſituations and occaſions to call forth the multiplied excellences of their nature. "Happy, "happy world, with what delight muſt your "great Creator and Governor witneſs your "conduct, and what a glorious recompence "awaits you when your term of probation "ſhall have expired.

"I, bone, quo virtus tua te vocat, i pede fauſto,
"Grandia laturus meritorum præmia."

But we have indulged too long in theſe delightful ſpeculations; a ſad reverſe preſents itſelf on our ſurvey of the *actual* ſtate of man, when, from viewing his *natural* powers, we follow him into *practice*, and ſee

Digitized by Google

the uſes to which he applies them. Take in the whole of the proſpect, view him in every age, and climate, and nation, in every condition and period of ſociety. Where now do you diſcover the characters of his exalted nature? "How is the gold become dim, and "the fine gold changed?" How is his reaſon clouded, his affections perverted, his conſcience ſtupified! How do anger, and envy, and hatred, and revenge, ſpring up in his wretched boſom! How is he a ſlave to the meaneſt of his appetites! What fatal propenſities does he diſcover to evil! What inaptitude to good!

SECT. I.

DWELL awhile on the ſtate of the ancient world; not merely on that benighted part of it where all lay buried in brutiſh ignorance and barbariſm, but on the ſeats of civilized and poliſhed nations, on the empire of taſte, and learning, and philoſophy: yet in theſe choſen regions, with whatever luſtre the ſun of ſcience poured forth its ray, the moral darkneſs was ſo thick "that it might be "felt." Behold their ſottiſh idolatries, their abſurd ſuperſtitions, their want of natural affection, their brutal exceſſes, their unfeeling oppreſſion, their ſavage cruelty! Look not to the illiterate and the vulgar, but to the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

the learned and refined. Form not your ideas from the conduct of the less restrained and more licentious; you will turn away with disgust and shame from the allowed and familiar habits of the decent and the moral. St. Paul best states the facts, and furnishes the explanation; "because they did not like "to retain God in their knowledge, he gave "them over to a reprobate mind *."

* Exempla duo, quæ pravitatis humanæ vim animo meo luculentur exhibent, non proferre non possum. Alterum decens ille Virgilius, alterum Cicero, probus idem verique studiosus, suppeditat. Virgilius, innocuam certe pastorum vitam depicturus, ita incipit.

"Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexim."

Cicero in libro de Officiis primo, ubi de actionibus prout inter se apte & convenientes sint, loci, temporis, & agentis ratione habita, disserit, argumentum sic illustrat: "Turpe est enim, valdeque vitiosum, in re severa, convivio dignum, aut delicatum aliquem inferre sermonem. Bene Pericles, quum haberet collegam in prætura Sophoclem poëtam, hique de communi officio convenissent, & casu formosus puer præteriret, dixissetque Sophocles, O puerum pulchrum Pericle! At enim, inquit Pericles, prætorem Sophoclem decet non solum manus, sed etiam oculos abstinentes habere. Atquî hoc idem Sophocles, 'si in athletarum probatione dixisset, *justa reprehensione caruisset, tanta vis est, & loci & temporis.*"

Quomodo sese res habuisse necesse est, cum vir antiquorum prestantissimis adscribendus, philosophiam, immo mores & officia tractans, talia doceret! Qualem sibi ipse virtutis normam propositerat, satis liquet. Vide inter alia, *justa reprehensione*, &c. & *tanta vis est*, &c. &c.

Now

Digitized by Google

Now direct your view to another quarter, to the inhabitants of a new hemisphere, where the baneful practices and contagious example of the old world had never travelled. Surely, among these children of nature we may expect to find those virtuous tendencies, for which we have hitherto looked in vain! Alas! our search will still be fruitless! They are represented by the historian of America, (whose account is more favourable than those of some other great authorities) as being a compound of pride, indolence, selfishness, cunning, and cruelty *; full of a revenge which nothing could satiate, of a ferocity which nothing could soften; strangers to the most amiable sensibilities of nature †. They appeared incapable of conjugal affection, or parental fondness, or filial reverence, or social attachments; uniting too with their state of barbarism, many of the vices and weaknesses of polished society. Their horrid treatment of captives taken in war, on whose bodies they feasted, after putting them to death by the most cruel tortures, is so well known, that we may spare the disgust-

* Robertson, Vol. II. p. 130.

† Ibid. Book IV. Sect. 2. Head, Condition of Women, vol. ii. 8vo. 90, 91.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

ing recital. No commendable qualities relieve this gloomy picture, except fortitude, and perſeverance, and zeal for the welfare of their little community; if this laſt quality, exerciſed and directed as it was, can be thought deſerving of commendation.

But you give up the heathen nations as indefenſible, and wiſh rather to form your eſtimate of man from a view of countries which have been bleſſed with the light of revelation.—True it is, and with joy let us record the conceſſion, Chriſtianity has ſet the general tone of morals much higher than it was ever found in the Pagan world. She has every where improved the character of man, and multiplied the comforts of ſociety, particularly to the poor and the weak, who from the beginning ſhe profeſſed to take under her ſpecial patronage. Like her divine Author, "who ſends his rain on the evil and on "the good," ſhe ſhowers down unnumbered bleſſings on thouſands who profit from her bounty, while they forget or deny her power, and ſet at nought her authority. Yet even in this more favoured ſituation we ſhall diſcover too many lamentable proofs of the depravity of man. Nay, this depravity will now become even more apparent and leſs excuſeable,

Digitized by Google

able. For what bars does it not now overleap? Over what motives is it not now victorious? Conſider well the ſuperior light and advantages which we enjoy, and then appreciate the ſuperior obligations which are impoſed on us. Conſider in how many caſes our evil propenſities are now kept from breaking forth, by the ſuperior reſtraints under which vice is laid among us by poſitive laws, and by the amended ſtandard of public opinion; and we may be aſſiſted in conjecturing what force is to be aſſigned to theſe motives, by the dreadful proofs which have been lately exhibited in a neighbouring country, that when their influence is withdrawn, the moſt atrocious crimes can be perpetrated ſhameleſsly and in the face of day. Conſider then the ſuperior excellence of our moral code, the new principles of obedience furniſhed by the goſpel, and above all, the awful ſanction which the doctrines and precepts of Chriſtianity derive from the clear diſcovery of a future ſtate of retribution, and from the annunciation of that tremendous day, "when "we ſhall ſtand before the judgement ſeat "of Chriſt." Yet, in ſpite of all our knowledge, thus enforced and preſſed home by ſo ſolemn a notice, how little has been our progreſs in virtue? It has been by no means

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

ſuch as to prevent the adoption, in our days, of various maxims of antiquity, which, when well conſidered, too clearly eſtabliſh the depravity of man. It may not be amiſs to adduce a few inſtances in proof of this aſſertion. It is now no leſs acknowledged than heretofore, that proſperity hardens the heart: that unlimited power is ever abuſed, inſtead of being rendered the inſtrument of diffuſing happineſs: that habits of vice grow up of themſelves, whilſt thoſe of virtue are of ſlow and difficult formation; that they who draw the fineſt pictures of virtue, and ſeem moſt enamoured of her charms, are often the leaſt under her influence, and by the mereſt trifles are drawn aſide from that line of conduct, which they moſt ſeriouſly recommend to others: that all this takes place, though moſt of the pleaſures of vice are to be found with leſs alloy in the paths of virtue; whilſt at the ſame time, theſe paths afford ſuperior and more exquiſite delights, peculiar to themſelves, and are free from the diſeaſes and bitter remorſe, at the price of which vicious gratifications are ſo often purchaſed.

It may ſuffice to touch very ſlightly on ſome other arguments, which it would hardly be right to leave altogether unnoticed: one of

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

of theſe (the juſtice of which, however denied by ſuperficial moraliſts, parents of ſtrict principles can abundantly teſtify) may be drawn from the perverſe and froward diſpoſitions perceivable in children, the correction of which too often baffles the moſt ſtrenuous efforts of the wiſe and good. Another may be drawn from the various deceits we are apt to practiſe on ourſelves, to which no one can be a ſtranger, who has ever contemplated the operations of his own mind with ſerious attention. To the influence of this ſpecies of corruption it has been in a great degree owing, that Chriſtianity itſelf has been too often diſgraced. The goſpel of peace has been turned into an engine of cruelty, and amidſt the bitterneſs of perſecution, every trace has diſappeared of the mild and beneficent ſpirit of the religion of Jeſus. In what degree muſt the taint have worked itſelf into the frame, and corrupted the habit, when the moſt wholeſome nutriment can be thus converted into the deadlieſt poiſon! Wiſhing always to argue from ſuch premiſes as are not only really ſound, but from ſuch as cannot even be queſtioned by thoſe to whom this work is addreſſed, little was ſaid in repreſenting the deplorable ſtate of the Heathen world, reſpecting their defective and unwor-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

thy conceptions in what regards the Supreme Being, who even then "left not himſelf "without witneſs, but gave them rain and "fruitful ſeaſons, filling their hearts with "food and gladneſs." But ſurely to any who call themſelves Chriſtians, it may be juſtly urged as an aſtoniſhing inſtance of human depravity, that we ourſelves, who enjoy the full light of Revelation; to whom God has vouchſafed ſuch clear diſcoveries of what we are concerned to know of his being and attributes; who profeſs to believe "that in "him we live, and move, and have our be-"ing;" that to him we owe all the comforts we here enjoy, and the offer of eternal Glory purchaſed for us by the atoning blood of his own Son; ("thanks be to God for his un-"ſpeakable gift,") that we, thus loaded with mercies, ſhould be continually chargeable with forgetting his authority, and being ungrateful for his benefits; with ſlighting his gracious propoſals, or at beſt receiving them with cold and unaffected hearts.

But to put the queſtion concerning the natural depravity of man to the ſevereſt teſt: take the beſt of the human ſpecies, the watchful ſelf-denying Chriſtian, and let *him* decide the controverſy; not by inferences drawn from

Digitized by Google

from the practices of a thoughtless and dissolute world, but by an appeal to his personal experience. Go with him into his closet, ask him *his* opinion of the corruption of the heart, and he will tell you that he is deeply sensible of its power, for that he has learned it from much self observation and long acquaintance with the workings of his own mind. He will tell you, that every day strengthens this conviction; yea, that hourly he sees fresh reason to deplore his want of simplicity in intention, his infirmity of purpose, his low views, his selfish unworthy desires, his backwardness to set about his duty, his languor and coldness in performing it: that he finds himself obliged continually to confess, that he feels within him two opposite principles, and that "he cannot do the things that he "would." He cries out in the language of the excellent Hooker, "The little fruit "which we have in holiness, it is, God "knoweth, corrupt and unsound: we put "no confidence at all in it, we challenge "nothing in the world for it, we dare not "call God to reckoning, as if we had him "in our debt books; our continual suit to "him is, and must be, to bear with our in-"firmities, and pardon our offences."

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

SUCH is the moral hiſtory, ſuch the condition of man. The figures of the piece may vary, and the colouring may ſometimes be of a darker, ſometimes of a lighter hue; but the principles of the compoſition, the grand outlines, are every where the ſame. Wherever we direct our view, we diſcover the melancholy proofs of our depravity; whether we look to ancient or modern times, to barbarous or civilized nations, to the conduct of the world around us, or to the monitor within the breaſt; whether we read, or hear, or act, or think, or feel, the ſame humiliating leſſon is forced upon us,

Juppiter eſt quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris.

Now when we look back to the picture which was formerly drawn of the *natural powers* of man, and compare this his *actual* ſtate with that for which, from a conſideration of thoſe powers, he ſeems to have been originally deſigned, how are we to account for the aſtoniſhing contraſt! will frailty or infirmity, or occaſional lapſes, or ſudden ſurpriſals, or any ſuch qualifying terms, convey an adequate idea of the nature of the diſtemper, or point out its cauſe? How, on any principles of common reaſoning, can we account

Digitized by Google

count for it, but by conceiving that man, ſince he came out of the hands of his Creator, has contracted a taint, and that the venom of this ſubtle poiſon has been communicated throughout the race of Adam, every where exhibiting inconteſtable marks of its fatal malignity? Hence it has ariſen, that the appetites deriving new ſtrength, and the powers of reaſon and conſcience being weakened, the latter have feebly and impotently pleaded againſt thoſe forbidden indulgences which the former have ſolicited. Senſual gratifications and illicit affections have debaſed our nobler powers, and indiſpoſed our hearts to the diſcovery of God, and to the conſideration of his perfections; to a conſtant willing ſubmiſſion to his authority, and obedience to his laws. By a repetition of vicious acts, evil habits have been formed within us, and have rivetted the fetters of ſin. Left to the conſequences of our own folly, the underſtanding has grown darker, and the heart more obdurate; reaſon has at length betrayed her truſt, and even conſcience herſelf has aided the deluſion, till, inſtead of deploring our miſerable condition, we have too often hugged our chains, and even gloried in our ignominious bondage.

SUCH

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

SUCH is the general account of the progreſs of vice, where it is ſuffered to attain to its full growth in the human heart. The circumſtances of individuals indeed will be found to differ; the ſervitude of ſome, to continue a figure ſo exactly deſcriptive of the caſe, is more rigorous than that of others, their bonds more galling, their degradation more complete. Some too have for a while appeared almoſt to have eſcaped from their confinement; but none are altogether free; all without exception, in a greater or leſs degree, bear about them more viſible or more concealed, the diſgraceful marks of their captivity.

SUCH on a full and fair inveſtigation muſt be confeſſed to be the ſtate of facts; and how can this be accounted for on any other ſuppoſition, than that of ſome original taint, ſome radical principle of corruption? All other ſolutions are unſatisfactory, whilſt the potent cauſe which has been aſſigned, does abundantly, and can alone ſufficiently account for the effect. It appears then, that the corruption of human nature is proved by the ſame mode of reaſoning, as that which hath been deemed concluſive in eſtabliſhing the exiſtence of the principle of gravitation and

Digitized by Google

ascertaining its laws; that the doctrine rests on that solid basis on which Newton hath raised the superstructure of his sublime philosophy; that it is not a mere speculation; an uncertain, though perhaps an ingenious theory, but the sure result of large and actual experiment; deduced from inconteſtable facts, and still more fully approving its truth by harmonizing with the several parts and accounting for the various phænomena, jarring otherwise and inexplicable, of the great system of the universe. SECT. I.

HERE, however, Revelation interposes, and sustains the fallible conjectures of our unassisted reason. The Holy Scriptures speak of us as fallen creatures; in almost every page we shall find something that is calculated to abate the loftiness and silence the pretensions of man. "The imagination of "man's heart is evil from his youth." "What "is man, that he should be clean? and he "which is born of a woman, that he should "be righteous *," "How much more abo-"minable and filthy is man, which drinketh "iniquity like water †?" "The Lord looked "down from heaven upon the children of

* Job, xv. 14. † Ibid. 16.

"men,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

"men, to see if there were any that did "understand, and seek God. They are all "gone aside; they are altogether become "filthy: there is none that doeth good, no "not one*." "Who can say, I have made "my heart clean, I am pure from my sin†?" "The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and "desperately wicked, who can know it." "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and "in sin hath my mother conceived me." "We were by nature the children of wrath, "even as others, fulfilling the desires of the "flesh and of the mind." "O wretched "man that I am, who shall deliver me from "the body of this death!"—Passages might be multiplied upon passages, which speak the same language, and these again might be illustrated and confirmed by various other considerations, drawn from the same sacred source; such as those which represent a thorough change, a renovation of our nature, as being necessary to our becoming true Christians; or which are suggested by observing that holy men refer their good dispositions and affections to the immediate agency of the Supreme Being.

* Psalm, xiv. 2, 3. † Prov. xx. 9.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.

Evil Spirit.—Natural State of Man.

Evil Spirit.

BUT the word of God inſtructs us that we have to contend not only with our own natural depravity, but with the power of darkneſs, the Evil Spirit, who rules in the hearts of the wicked, and whoſe dominion we learn from Scripture to be ſo general, as to entitle him to the denomination of "the "Prince of this world." There cannot be a ſtronger proof of the difference which exiſts between the religious ſyſtem of the Scriptures, and that of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians, than the proof which is afforded by the ſubject now in queſtion. The exiſtence and agency of the Evil Spirit, though ſo diſtinctly and repeatedly affirmed in Scripture, are almoſt univerſally exploded in a country which profeſſes to admit the authority of the ſacred volume. Some other Doctrines of Revelation, the force and meaning of which are commonly in a great degree explained away, are yet conceded in general terms. But this ſeems almoſt on the point of being univerſally abandoned, as a poſt no longer tenable. It is regarded as an evaneſcent prejudice, which it would now be a diſcredit to any man of under-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

underſtanding to believe. Like ghoſts and witches and other phantoms, which haunted the night of ſuperſtition, it cannot in theſe more enlightened times ſtand the teſt of our ſeverer ſcrutiny. To be ſuffered to paſs away quietly, is as much as it can hope for; and it might rather expect to be laughed off the ſtage as a juſt object of contempt and deriſion.

But although the Scripture doctrine concerning the Evil Spirit is thus generally exploded, yet were we to conſider the matter ſeriouſly and fairly, we ſhould probably find ground for believing that there is no better reaſon for its being abandoned, than that many abſurd ſtories, concerning ſpirits and apparitions, have been uſed to be propagated amongſt weak and credulous people; and that the Evil Spirit not being the object of our bodily eyes, it would argue the ſame weakneſs to give credit to the doctrine of its exiſtence and agency. But to be conſiſtent with ourſelves, we might almoſt as well, on the ſame principle, deny the reality of all other incorporeal beings. What is there, in truth, in the doctrine, which is in itſelf improbable, or which is not confirmed by analogy? We ſee, in fact, that there are wicked men,

Digitized by Google

men, enemies to God, and malignant towards their fellow-creatures, who take pleaſure, and often ſucceed, in ſeducing others to the commiſſion of evil. Why then ſhould it be deemed incredible, that there may be ſpiritual intelligences of ſimilar propenſities, who may in like manner be permitted to tempt men to the practice of ſin? Surely we may retort upon our opponents the charge of abſurdity, and juſtly accuſe them of groſs inconſiſtency, in admitting, without difficulty, the exiſtence and operation of theſe qualities in a being like man, compounded of matter and ſpirit, and yet denying them in a purely ſpiritual Being (in direct contradiction to the authority of Scripture, which they allow to be concluſive) when they cannot pretend for a moment, that there is any thing belonging to the nature of matter, to which theſe qualities naturally adhere. SECT. II.

Natural State of Man.

But it is needleſs to dilate farther on a topic which, however it may excite the ridicule of the inconſiderate, will ſuggeſt matter of ſerious apprehenſion to all who form their opinions on a ſincere and impartial examination of the word of God. Thus brought as we are into captivity, and expoſed to danger; depraved and weakened within, and tempted from

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

from without, it might well fill our hearts with anxiety to reflect, "that the day will come," when "the Heavens being on fire "shall be dissolved, and the elements shall "melt with fervent heat;" "when the dead, "small and great, shall stand before the tri- "bunal of God," and we shall have to give account of all things done in the body. We are naturally prompted to turn over the page of revelation with solicitude, in order to discover the attributes and character of our Judge, but these only serve to turn painful apprehension into fixed and certain terror.—First with regard to the attributes of our Judge. As all nature bears witness to his irresistible power, so we read in Scripture that nothing can escape his observation, or elude his discovery; not only our actions, but our most secret cogitations are open to his view. "He is about our path and about "our bed, and spieth out all our ways *." "The Lord searcheth all hearts, and un- "derstandeth all the imaginations of the "thoughts †."—"And he will bring to light "the hidden things of darkness, and will "make manifest the counsels of the heart."

* Psalm, cxxxix. 3. † 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

Now,

Digitized by Google

Now, hear his character, and the rule of his award: "The Lord our God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God."—"He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."—"The wages of sin is death." These positive declarations are enforced by the accounts which, for our warning, we read in sacred history, of the terrible vengeance of the Almighty: His punishment of "the angels "who kept not their first estate, and whom "he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the "great day:" The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah; the sentence issued against the idolatrous nations of Canaan, and of which the execution was assigned to the Israelites, by the express command of God, at their own peril in case of disobedience: The ruin of Babylon, of Tyre, of Nineveh, and of Jerusalem, prophetically denounced as the punishment of their crimes, and taking place in an exact and terrible accordance with the divine predictions. Surely these examples may suffice to confound that fallacious confidence, which, presuming on the Creator's knowledge of our weakness, and his disposition to allow for it, should allege, that instead of giving way to gloomy apprehensions, we

SECT. II.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

might throw ourſelves, in full aſſurance of hope, on the infinite benevolence of the Supreme Being. It is true, indeed, that with the threatenings of the word of God, there are mixed many gracious declarations of pardon, on repentance, and thorough amendment. But, alas! who is there among us whoſe conſcience muſt not reproach him with having trifled with the long-ſuffering of God, and with having but ill kept the reſolutions of amendment, which had been formed in the ſeaſons of recollection and remorſe?—And how is the diſquietude naturally excited by ſuch a retroſpect, confirmed and heightened by paſſages like theſe? "Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed; I have "ſtretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have ſet at nought all my "counſel, and would none of my reproof; I "alſo will laugh at your calamity; I will "mock when your fear cometh: when your "fear cometh as deſolation, and your deſtruc"tion cometh as a whirlwind; when diſtreſs "and anguiſh cometh upon you: then ſhall "they call upon me, but I will not anſwer; "they ſhall ſeek me early, but they ſhall not "find me: for that they hated knowledge, "and did not chuſe the fear of the Lord *."

* Prov. i. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

The

Digitized by Google

The apprehenſions, which muſt be excited by thus reading the recorded judgements and aweful language of Scripture, are confirmed to the inquiſitive and attentive mind, by a cloſe obſervation of the moral conſtitution of the world. In fact all that has been ſuggeſted of the final conſequences of vice, is ſtrictly analogous to what we may obſerve in the ordinary courſe of human affairs, from a careful ſurvey of which it will appear, that God hath eſtabliſhed ſuch an order of cauſes and effects, as (however interrupted here below by hindrances and obſtructions apparently of a temporary nature) loudly proclaim the principles of his moral government, and ſtrongly ſuggeſt, that vice and imprudence will finally terminate in miſery *(a)*. Not that this ſpecies of proof was wanted; for that which we muſt acknowledge, on weighing the evidence, to be a revelation from God, requires not the aid of ſuch a confirmation: but yet, as this accordance might be expected between the words and the works of the ſame Almighty Being, it is no idle ſpeculation to remark, that the viſible conſtitution of things in the world around us, falls in with the ſcriptural repreſentations of the dreadful conſequences of vice, nay even

(a) Vide Butler's Analogy.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

of what is commonly termed inconſiderateneſs and imprudence.

IF ſuch then be indeed our ſad condition, what is to be done? Is there no hope? Nothing left for us, "but a fearful looking for "of judgement, and fiery indignation, which "ſhall devour the adverſaries *?" Bleſſed be God! we are not ſhut up irrecoverably in this ſad condition: "Turn you to the ſtrong "hold, ye priſoners of hope;" hear one who proclaims his deſignation, "to heal the "broken-hearted, to preach liberty to the "captives, and recovering of ſight to the "blind." They who have formed a true notion of their loſt and helpleſs ſtate, will moſt gladly liſten to the ſound, and moſt juſtly eſtimate the value of ſuch a deliverance. And hence appears the importance of not paſſing over in a curſory manner thoſe important topics of the original and ſuperinduced corruption, and weakneſs of man; a diſcuſſion painful and humiliating to the pride of human nature, to which the mind liſtens with difficulty, nay with a mixture of anger and diſguſt; but well ſuited to our caſe, and like the diſtaſteful leſſons of adverſity,

Chriſtianity breaks in.

* Heb. x. 27.

permanently

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

Practical importance and uſes of the doctrine of Human Corruption.

permanently uſeful in its conſequences. It is here, never let it be forgotten, that our foundation muſt be laid; otherwiſe our ſuperſtructure, whatever we may think of it, will one day prove tottering and inſecure. This therefore is not a metaphyſical ſpeculation, but a practical matter. Slight and ſuperficial conceptions of our ſtate of natural degradation, and of our inſufficiency to recover from it of ourſelves, fall in too well with our natural inconſiderateneſs, and produce that fatal inſenſibility to the divine warning to "flee from the wrath to come," which we cannot but obſerve to prevail ſo generally. Having no due ſenſe of the malignity of our diſeaſe, and of its dreadful iſſue, we do not ſet ourſelves to work in earneſt to obtain the remedy, for let it be remembered, that this deliverance is not *forced on us*, but *offered to us*; we are furniſhed indeed with every help, and are always to bear in mind, that we are unable of ourſelves to will or to do rightly; but we are plainly admoniſhed to "work out our own ſalvation with fear and "trembling*;"—to be watchful, "becauſe "we are encompaſſed with dangers;"—to

* Philippians, ii. 12.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

"put on the whole armour of God," becauſe "we are beſet with enemies."

MAY we be enabled to ſhake off that lethargy which is ſo apt to creep upon us! For this end, a deep practical conviction of our natural depravity and weakneſs will be found of eminent advantage. As it is by this we muſt at firſt be rouzed from our fallacious ſecurity, ſo by this we muſt be kept wakeful and active unto the end. Let us therefore make it our buſineſs to have this doctrine firmly ſeated in our underſtandings, and radically worked into our hearts. With a view to the former of theſe objects, we ſhould ſeriouſly and attentively conſider the firm grounds on which it reſts. It is plainly made known to us by the light of nature, and irreſiſtibly enforced on us by the dictates of our unaſſiſted underſtandings. But leſt there ſhould be any ſo obſtinately dull, as not to diſcern the force of the evidence ſuggeſted to our reaſon, and confirmed by all experience, or rather ſo heedleſs as not to notice it, the authoritative ſtamp of Revelation is ſuperadded, as we have ſeen, to complete the proof; and we muſt therefore be altogether inexcuſable, if we ſtill remain unconvinced

Practical advice reſpecting it, and its practical uſes.

Digitized by Google

vinced by ſuch an accumulated maſs of argument. SECT. II.

BUT it is not ſufficient to *aſſent* to the doctrine, we muſt alſo *feel* it. To this end, let the power of habit be called in to our aid. Let us accuſtom ourſelves to refer to our natural depravity, as to their primary cauſe, the ſad inſtances of vice and folly of which we read, or which we ſee around us, or to which we feel the propenſities in our own boſoms; ever vigilant and diſtruſtful of ourſelves, and looking with an eye of kindneſs and pity on the faults and infirmities of others, whom we ſhould learn to regard with the ſame tender concern as that with which the ſick are uſed to ſympathize with thoſe who are ſuffering under the ſame diſtemper. This leſſon once well acquired, we ſhall feel the benefit of it in all our future progreſs; and though it be a leſſon which we are ſlow to learn, it is one in which ſtudy and experience, the incidents of every day, and every freſh obſervation of the workings of our own hearts, will gradually concur to perfect us. Let it not, after all then, be our reproach, and at length our ruin, that theſe abundant means of inſtruction are poſſeſſed in vain.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

SECTION III.

Corruption of Human Nature.—Objection.

Objection: —That our corruption and weakneſs being natural to us, will be excuſed and allowed for—ſtated, and conſidered.

BUT there is one difficulty ſtill behind, more formidable than all the reſt. The pride of man is loth to be humbled. Forced to abandon the plea of innocence, and preſſed ſo cloſely that he can no longer eſcape from the concluſion to which we would drive him, ſome more bold objector faces about and ſtands at bay, endeavouring to juſtify what he cannot deny, "Whatever I am," he contends, "I am what my Creator made me. "I inherit a nature, you yourſelf confeſs, de- "praved, and prone to evil: how then can "I withſtand the temptations to ſin by which "I am environed? If this plea cannot eſta- "bliſh my innocence, it muſt excuſe or at "leaſt extenuate my guilt. Frail and weak "as I am, a Being of infinite juſtice and "goodneſs will never try me by a rule, "which however equitable in the caſe of "creatures of a higher nature, is altogether "diſproportionate to mine."

LET not my readers be alarmed! The writer is not going to enter into the diſcuſ- ſion

Digitized by Google

ſion of the grand queſtion concerning the origin of moral evil, or to attempt to reconcile its exiſtence and conſequent puniſhment with the acknowledged attributes and perfections of God. Theſe are queſtions, of which, if one may judge from the little ſucceſs with which the acuteſt and profoundeſt reaſoners have been ever labouring to ſolve the difficulties they contain, the full and clear comprehenſion is above the intellect of man. Yet, as the objection above mentioned is ſometimes heard from the mouths of profeſſed Chriſtians, it muſt not be paſſed by without a few ſhort obſervations,

WERE the language in queſtion to be addreſſed to us by an avowed ſceptic, though it might not be very difficult to expoſe to him the futility of *his* reaſonings, we ſhould almoſt deſpair of ſatisfying him of the ſoundneſs of our own. We ſhould perhaps ſuggeſt impoſſibilities, which might ſtand in the way of ſuch a ſyſtem as he would eſtabliſh: we might indeed point out wherein (arguing from conceſſions which he would freely make) his pre-conceptions concerning the conduct of the Supreme Being, had been in fact already contradicted, particularly by the exiſtence at all of natural or moral evil: and if thus proved

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

proved erroneous in one inſtance, why might they not be ſo likewiſe in another? But though by theſe and ſimilar arguments we might at length ſilence our objector, we could not much expect to bring him over to our opinions. We ſhould probably do better, if we were to endeavour rather to draw him off from thoſe dark and ſlippery regions, (ſlippery in truth they are to every human foot) and to contend with him, where we might tread with firmneſs and freedom, on ſure ground, and in the light of day. Then we might fairly lay before him all the various arguments for the truth of our holy religion; arguments which have been ſufficient to ſatisfy the wiſeſt, and the beſt, and the ableſt of men. We might afterwards inſiſt on the abundant confirmation Chriſtianity receives from its being exactly ſuited to the nature and wants of man; and we might conclude, with fairly putting it to him, whether all this weight of evidence were to be overbalanced by one difficulty, on a ſubject ſo confeſſedly high and myſterious, conſidering too that he muſt allow, we ſee but a part (O how ſmall a part!) of the univerſal creation of God, and that our faculties are wholly incompetent to judge of the ſchemes of his infinite wiſdom. This, if the writer may be permitted

Digitized by Google

permitted to offer his own judgement, is (at leaſt in general) the beſt mode, in the caſe of the objection now in queſtion, of dealing with unbelievers; and to adopt the contrary plan, ſeems ſomewhat like that of any one, who having to convince ſome untutored Indian of the truth of the Copernican ſyſtem, inſtead of beginning with plain and ſimple propoſitions, and leading him on to what is more abſtruſe and remote, ſhould ſtate to him at the outſet ſome ſtartling problems, to which the underſtanding can only yield its ſlow aſſent, when conſtrained by the deciſive force of demonſtration. The novice, inſtead of lending himſelf to ſuch a miſtaken method of inſtruction, would turn away in diſguſt, and be only hardened againſt his preceptor. But it muſt be remembered, that the preſent work is addreſſed to thoſe who acknowledge the authority of the holy Scriptures. And in order to convince all ſuch that there is, ſomewhere or other, a fallacy in our objector's reaſoning, it will be ſufficient to eſtabliſh that though the word of God clearly aſſerts the juſtice and goodneſs of the Supreme Being, and alſo the natural depravity of man, yet it no leſs clearly lays down that this natural depravity ſhall never be admitted as an excuſe for ſin, but that "they

"which

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

"which have done evil, shall rise to the re-
"surrection of damnation *"—"That the
"wicked shall be turned into hell, and all
"the people that forget God." And it is worthy of remark, that, as if for the very purpose of more effectually silencing those unbelieving doubts which are ever springing up in the human heart, our blessed Saviour, though the messenger of peace and good will to man, has again and again repeated these aweful denunciations.

Nor are the holy Scriptures less clear and full in guarding us against supposing our sins, or the dreadful consequences of them, to be chargeable on God.—"Let no man say when "he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither "tempteth he any man †:" "The Lord is "not willing that any should perish ‡." And in other passages, where the idea is repelled as injurious to his character,—"Have I any "pleasure at all that the wicked should die? "saith the Lord God; and not that he should "return from his ways, and live ||?" "For "I have no pleasure in the death of him that "dieth, saith the Lord God §." Indeed al-

* John, v. 29. † James, i. 13. ‡ 2 Peter, iii. 9.
|| Ezek. xviii. 23. § Ezek. xviii. 32.

Digitized by Google

moſt every page of the word of God contains ſome warning or invitation to ſinners; and all theſe, to a conſiderate mind, muſt be unqueſtionable proofs of our preſent poſition.

It has been the more neceſſary not to leave unnoticed the objection which we have been now refuting, becauſe, where not admitted to ſuch an unqualified extent as altogether to take away the moral reſponſibility of man, and when not avowed in the daring language in which it has been above ſtated; it may frequently be obſerved to exiſt in an inferior degree: and often, when not diſtinctly formed into ſhape, it lurks in ſecret, diffuſing a general cloud of doubt or unbelief, or lowering our ſtandard of right, or whiſpering fallacious comfort, and producing a ruinous tranquillity. It is of the utmoſt importance to remark, that though the holy Scriptures ſo clearly ſtate the natural corruption and weakneſs of man, yet they never, in the remoteſt degree, countenance, but throughout directly oppoſe, the ſuppoſition to which we are often too forward to liſten, that our natural corruption and weakneſs will be admitted as lowering the demands of divine juſtice, and in ſome ſort palliating our tranſgreſſions of the laws of God.

It

Digitized by Google

CHAP. II.

It would not be difficult to ſhew that ſuch a notion is at war with the whole ſcheme of redemption by the atonement of Chriſt. But perhaps it may be enough when any ſuch ſuggeſtions as thoſe which we are condemning force themſelves into the imagination of a Chriſtian, to recommend it to him to ſilence them by what is their beſt practical anſwer: that if our natural condition be depraved and weak, our temptations numerous, and our Almighty Judge infinitely holy; yet that the offers to penitent ſinners of pardon and grace, and ſtrength, are univerſal and unlimited. Let it not however ſurpriſe us, if in all this there ſeem to be involved difficulties which we cannot fully comprehend. How many ſuch every where preſent themſelves! Scarcely is there an object around us, that does not afford endleſs matter of doubt and argument. The meaneſt reptile which crawls on the earth, nay, every herb and flower which we behold, baffles the imbecility of our limited inquiries. All nature calls upon us to be humble. Can it then be ſurpriſing if we are at a loſs on this queſtion, which reſpects, not the properties of matter, or of numbers, but the counſels and ways of him whoſe "Underſtanding is infinite *,"

* Pſalm cxlvii. 5.

"whoſe

" whoſe judgements are declared to be un- SECT.
" ſearchable, and his ways paſt finding out *?" III.
In this our ignorance however, we may calmly repoſe ourſelves on his own declaration, " That though clouds and darkneſs are round " about him, yet righteouſneſs and judgement " are the habitation of his throne †." Let it alſo be remembered, that if in Chriſtianity ſome things are difficult, that which we are moſt concerned to know, is plain and obvious. To this it is true wiſdom to attach ourſelves, aſſenting to what is revealed where above our comprehenſion, we do not ſay contrary to our reaſon, on the credit of what is clearly diſcerned, and ſatisfactorily eſtabliſhed. In truth, we are all perhaps too apt to plunge into depths, which it is beyond our power to fathom; and it was to warn us againſt this very error, that the inſpired writer, when he has been threatening the people, whom God had ſelected as the objects of his ſpecial favour, with the moſt dreadful puniſhments, if they ſhould forſake the law of the Lord, and has introduced ſurrounding nations as aſking the meaning of the ſevere infliction, winds up the whole with this inſtructive admonition; " Secret

* Rom. xi. 33. † Pſalm xcvii. 2.

" things

CHAP. II.

" things belong unto the Lord our God: " but thoſe which are revealed belong unto " us, and to our children for ever, that we " may *do* all the words of this law *."

To any one who is ſeriouſly impreſſed with a ſenſe of the critical ſtate in which we are here placed, a ſhort and uncertain ſpace in which to make our peace with God, and then the laſt judgement, and an eternity of unſpeakable happineſs or miſery, it is indeed an aweful and an affecting ſpectacle, to ſee men thus buſying themſelves in vain ſpeculations of an arrogant curioſity, and trifling with their deareſt, their everlaſting intereſts. It is but a feeble illuſtration of this exquiſite folly, to compare it to the conduct of ſome convicted rebel, who, when brought into the preſence of his Sovereign, inſtead of ſeizing the occaſion to ſue for mercy, ſhould even treat with neglect and contempt the pardon which ſhould be offered to him, and inſolently employ himſelf in prying into his Sovereign's deſigns, and criticiſing his counſels. But our caſe, too ſimilar as it is to that of the convicted rebel, differs from it in this grand particular, that at the beſt, his ſucceſs

* Deut. xxix. 29.

muſt

Digitized by Google

must be uncertain, ours, if it be not our own fault, is sure; and while, on the one hand, our guilt is unspeakably greater than that of any rebel against an earthly monarch; so, on the other, we know that our Sovereign is "Long suffering, and easy to be intreated;" more ready to grant forgiveness than we to ask it. Well then may we adopt the language of the poet: SECT. III.

> What better can we do, than prostrate fall
> Before him reverent; and there confess
> Humbly our faults, and pardon beg; with tears
> Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air
> Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
> Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek?

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III.

Chief defects of the Religious Syſtem of the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians, in what regards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and the Holy Spirit —with a Diſſertation concerning the uſe of the Paſſions in Religion.

SECT. I.

INADEQUATE CONCEPTIONS CONCERNING OUR SAVIOUR AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

CHAP. III.

Leading Doctrines concerning Chriſt and the Holy Spirit, as ſtated in Scripture.

THAT "God ſo loved the world, as of "his tender mercy to give his only Son "Jeſus Chriſt for our redemption:"

That our bleſſed Lord willingly left the glory of the Father, and was made man;

That "he was deſpiſed and rejected of "men, a man of ſorrows, and acquainted "with grief:"

That "he was wounded for our tranſ- "greſſions; that he was bruiſed for our ini- "quities:"

That "the Lord laid on him the iniquity "of us all;"

That at length "he humbled himſelf even "to

Digitized by Google

"to the death of the Croſs, for us miſerable "ſinners; to the end that all who with hearty "repentance and true faith, ſhould come to "him, might not periſh, but have everlaſting "life:"

That he "is now at the right hand of "God, making intercеſſion" for his people:

That "being reconciled to God by the "death of his Son, we may come boldly un- "to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy and "find grace to help in time of need:"

That our Heavenly Father "will ſurely "give his Holy Spirit to them that aſk him:"

That "the Spirit of God muſt dwell in "us;" and that "if any man have not the "Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his:"

That by this divine influence "we are to "be renewed in knowledge after the image "of him who created us," and "to be filled "with the fruits of righteouſneſs, to the praiſe "of the glory of his grace;"—that "being "thus made meet for the inheritance of the "ſaints in light," we ſhall ſleep in the Lord; and that when the laſt trumpet ſhall ſound, this corruption ſhall put on incorruption—and that being at length perfected after his likeneſs, we ſhall be admitted into his heavenly kingdom.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

THESE are the leading Doctrines concerning our Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, which are taught in the Holy Scriptures, and held by the Church of England. The truth of them, agreeably to our general plan, will be taken for granted. Few of those, who have been used to join in the established form of worship, can have been, it is hoped, so inattentive, as to be ignorant of these grand truths, which are to be found every where dispersed throughout our excellent Liturgy. Would to God it could be presumed, with equal confidence, that all who assent to them in terms, discern their force and excellency in the understanding, and feel their power in the affections, and their transforming influence in the heart. What lively emotions are they calculated to excite in us of deep self-abasement, and abhorrence of our sins; together with humble hope, and firm faith, and heavenly joy, and ardent love, and active unceasing gratitude!

Popular Notions.

BUT here, it is to be feared, will be found a grand defect in the religion of the bulk of professed Christians; a defect, like the palsy at the heart, which, while in its first attack, it changes but little the exterior appearance of the body, extinguishes the internal principle

Digitized by Google

ciple of heat and motion, and ſoon extends its benumbing influence to the remoteſt fibres of the frame. This defect is cloſely connected with that which was the chief ſubject of the laſt chapter; "they that are whole need not "a phyſician, but they that are ſick." Had we duly felt the burthen of our ſins, accompanied with a deep conviction that the weight of them muſt finally ſink us into perdition, our hearts would have danced at the ſound of the gracious invitation, "Come unto me, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and "I will give you reſt *." But in thoſe who have ſcarcely felt their ſins as any incumbrance, it would be mere affectation to pretend to very exalted conceptions of the value and acceptableneſs of the proffered deliverance. This pretence accordingly, is ſeldom now kept up; and the moſt ſuperficial obſerver, comparing the ſentiments and views of the bulk of the Chriſtian world, with the articles ſtill retained in their creed, and with the ſtrong language of Scripture, muſt be ſtruck with the amazing diſproportion. SECT. I.

To paſs over the throng from whoſe minds Religion is altogether excluded by the buſineſs

* Matt. xi. 28.

Digitized by Google

CHAR. III.

or the vanities of life, how is it with the more decent and moral? To what criterion ſhall we appeal? Are their hearts really filled with theſe things, and warmed by the love which they are adapted to inſpire? Then ſurely their minds are apt to ſtray to them almoſt unſeaſonably; or at leaſt to haſten back to them with eagerneſs, when eſcaped from the eſtrangement impoſed by the neceſſary cares and buſineſs of life. He was a maſterly deſcriber of human nature, who thus pourtrayed the characters of an undiſſembled affection;

> "Unſtaid and fickle in all other things,
> "Save in the conſtant image of the object,
> "That is beloved."

"And how," it may be perhaps replied, "do you know, but that the minds of theſe "people are thus occupied? Can you look "into the boſoms of men?" Let us appeal to a teſt to which we reſorted in a former inſtance. "Out of the abundance of the heart," it has been pronounced, "the mouth ſpeak-"eth." Take theſe perſons then in ſome well ſelected hour, and lead the converſation to the ſubject of Religion. The utmoſt which can be effected is, to bring them to talk of things in the groſs. They appear loſt in generalities; there is nothing preciſe and determinate,

Digitized by Google

terminate, nothing which implies a mind uſed to the contemplation of its object. In vain you ſtrive to bring them to ſpeak on that topic, which one might expect to be ever uppermoſt in the hearts of redeemed ſinners. They elude all your endeavours; and if you make mention of it yourſelf, it is received with no very cordial welcome at leaſt, if not with unequivocal diſguſt; it is at the beſt a forced and formal diſcuſſion. The excellence of our Saviour's moral precepts, the kindneſs and ſimplicity, the ſelf-denial and unblemiſhed purity of his life, his patience and meekneſs in the hour of death, cannot indeed be ſpoken of but with admiration, when ſpoken of at all, as they have often extorted unwilling praiſe from the moſt daring and malignant infidels. But are not theſe mentioned as qualities in the abſtract, rather than as the perfections and lineaments of our patron and benefactor and friend, "who loved us, and gave himſelf for us;" of him "who died for *our* offences, and "roſe again for *our* juſtification;" "who "is even now at the right hand of God, "making interceſſion for *us*?" Who would think that the kindneſs and humanity, and ſelf-denial, and patience in ſuffering, which we ſo drily commend, had been exerted towards *ourſelves*, in acts of more than finite

SECT. I.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

benevolence of which *we* were to derive the benefit, in condescensions and labours submitted to for *our* sakes, in pain and ignominy, endured for *our* deliverance?

But these grand truths are not suffered to vanish altogether from our remembrance. Thanks to the compilers of our Liturgy, more than to too many of the occupiers of our pulpits, they are forced upon our notice in their just bearings and connections, as often as we attend the service of the church. Yet is it too much to affirm, that though there entertained with decorum, as what belong to the day and place, and occupation, they are yet too generally heard of with little interest; like the legendary tales of some venerable historian, or other transactions of great antiquity, if not of doubtful credit, which, though important to our ancestors, relate to times and circumstances so different from our own, that we cannot be expected to take any great concern in them? We hear them therefore with apparent indifference; we repeat them almost as it were by rote, assuming by turns the language of the deepest humiliation and of the warmest thankfulness, with a calm unaltered composure; and when the service of the day is ended,

Digitized by Google

ended, they are diſmiſſed altogether from our thoughts, till on the return of another Sunday, a freſh attendance on public worſhip gives occaſion for the renewed expreſſions of our periodical humility and gratitude. In noticing ſuch lukewarmneſs as this, ſurely the writer were to be pardoned, if he were to be betrayed into ſome warmth of condemnation. The Unitarian and Socinian indeed, who deny, or explain away the peculiar doctrines of the Goſpel, may be allowed to feel theſe grand truths, and to talk of them with little emotion. But in thoſe who profeſs a ſincere belief in them, this coldneſs is inſupportable. The greateſt poſſible ſervices of man to man muſt appear contemptible, when compared with "the unſpeakable mer-"cies of Chriſt:" mercies ſo dearly bought, ſo freely beſtowed—A deliverance from eternal miſery—The gift of a "crown of glory, "that fadeth not away." Yet, what judgement ſhould we form of ſuch conduct, as is here cenſured, in the caſe of any one who had received ſome ſignal ſervices from a fellow creature? True love is an ardent and an active principle—a cold, a dormant, a phlegmatic gratitude, are contradictions in terms. When theſe generous affections really exiſt in vigour, are we not ever fond of dwelling on

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

on the value, and enumerating the merits of our benefactor? How are we moved when any thing is aſſerted to his diſparagement! How do we delight to tell of his kindneſs! With what pious care do we preſerve any memorial of him, which we may happen to poſſeſs? How gladly do we ſeize any opportunity of rendering to him, or to thoſe who are dear to him, any little good offices, which, though in themſelves of ſmall intrinſic worth, may teſtify the ſincerity of our thankfulneſs! The very mention of his name will cheer the heart, and light up the countenance! And if he be now no more, and if he had made it his dying requeſt that, in a way of his own appointment, we would occaſionally meet to keep the memory of his perſon, and of his ſervices in lively exerciſe; how ſhould we reſent the idea of failing in the performance of ſo ſacred an obligation!

SUCH are the genuine characters, ſuch the natural workings of a lively gratitude. And can we believe, without doing violence to the moſt eſtabliſhed principles of human nature, that where the *effects* are ſo different, the *internal principle* is in truth the ſame?

IF

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

If the love of Chriſt be thus languid in the bulk of nominal Chriſtians, their joy and truſt in him cannot be expected to be very vigorous. Here again we find reaſon to remark, that there is nothing diſtinct, nothing ſpecific, nothing which implies a mind acquainted with the nature of the Chriſtian's privileges, and familiarized with their uſe; habitually ſolacing itſelf with the hopes held out by the Goſpel, and animated by the ſenſe of its high relations, and its glorious reverſion.

The doctrine of the ſanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit, appears to have met with ſtill worſe treatment. It would be to convey a very inadequate idea of the ſcantineſs of the conceptions on this head, of the bulk of the Chriſtian world, to affirm merely, that they are too little conſcious of the inefficacy of their own unaſſiſted endeavours after holineſs of heart and life, and that they are not daily employed in humbly and diligently uſing the appointed means for the reception and cultivation of the divine aſſiſtance. We ſhould hardly go beyond the truth in aſſerting, that for the moſt part their notions on this ſubject are ſo confuſed and faint, that they can ſcarce-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

ly be said in any fair sense to believe the doctrine at all.

Language of one who objects against the religious affections towards our Saviour.

THE writer of these sheets is by no means unapprized of the objections which he may expect from those, whose opinions he has been so freely condemning. He is prepared to hear it urged, that often where there have been the strongest pretences to the religious affections, there has been little or nothing of the reality of them; and that even omitting the instances (which however have been but too frequent) of studied hypocrisy, those affections which have assumed to themselves the name of religious have been merely the flights of a lively imagination, or the working of a heated brain; in particular, that this love of our Saviour, which has been so warmly recommended, is no better than a vain fervor, which dwells only in the disordered mind of the enthusiast. That Religion is of a more steady nature; of a more sober and manly quality; and that she rejects with scorn, the support of a mere feeling, so volatile and indeterminate, so trivial and useless, as that with which we would associate her; a feeling varying in different men, and even in the same man at different times, according to the accidental flow of the animal spirits; a feeling,

Digitized by Google

feeling, of which it may perhaps be ſaid, we are from our very nature, hardly ſuſceptible towards an inviſible Being. SECT. I.

And againſt the operations of the Holy Spirit.

"As to the operations of the Holy Spirit," it may probably be further urged, that "it "is perhaps ſcarcely worth while to ſpend "much time in inquiring into the theory, "when, in practice at leaſt, it is manifeſt, "that there is no ſure criterion whereby "any one can aſcertain the reality of them, "even in his own caſe, much leſs in that of "another. All we know is, that pretenders "to theſe extraordinary aſſiſtances, have never "been wanting to abuſe the credulity of the "vulgar, and to try the patience of the wiſe. "From the canting hypocrites and wild fa- "natics of the laſt century, to their leſs dan- "gerous, chiefly becauſe leſs ſucceſsful, de- "ſcendants of the preſent day, we hear the "ſame unwarranted claims, the ſame idle "tales, the ſame low cant; and we may diſ- "cern not ſeldom the ſame mean artifices "and mercenary ends. The doctrine, to "ſay the beſt of it, can only ſerve to favour "the indolence of man, while profeſſing to "furniſh him with a compendious method "of becoming wiſe and good, it ſuperſedes "the neceſſity of his own perſonal labours.

"Quitting

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

"Quitting therefore all ſuch ſlothful and "chimerical ſpeculations, it is true wiſdom "to attach ourſelves to what is more ſolid "and practical; to the work which you will "not deny to be ſufficiently difficult to find "us of itſelf full employment: the work of "rectifying the diſorders of the paſſions, and "of implanting and cultivating the virtues "of the moral character."—"It is the ſer-"vice of the underſtanding which God re-"quires of us, which you would degrade into "a mere matter of bodily temperament, and "imaginary impulſes. You are contending "for that which not only is altogether un-"worthy of our Divine Maſter, but which, "with conſiderate men, has ever brought his "religion into ſuſpicion and diſrepute, and "under a ſhew of honouring him, ſerves on-"ly to injure and diſcredit his cauſe." Our Objector, warming as he proceeds, will perhaps aſſume a more impatient tone. "Have "not theſe doctrines," he may exclaim, "been "ever perverted to purpoſes the moſt diſ-"graceful to the Religion of Jeſus? If you "want an inſtance, look to the ſtandard of "the inquiſition, and behold the pious Do-"minicans torturing their miſerable victims "for the Love of Chriſt*. Or would you

* This was the motto on their banner.

"rather

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

"rather ſee the effects of your principles on "a larger ſcale, and *by wholeſale* (if the "phraſe may be pardoned;) caſt your eyes "acroſs the Atlantic, and let your zeal be "edified by the holy activity of Cortez and "Pizarro, and their apoſtles of the weſtern "hemiſphere. To what elſe have been ow-"ing the extenſive ravages of national per-"ſecutions, and religious wars and cruſades; "whereby rapacity, and pride, and cruelty, "ſheltering themſelves under the maſk of "this ſpecious principle, have ſo often af-"flicted the world? The Prince of peace has "been made to aſſume the port of a ferocious "conqueror, and forgetting the meſſage of "good will to men, has iſſued forth like a "ſecond Scourge of the Earth *, to plague "and deſolate the human ſpecies."

Reply to the above Allegations.

THAT the ſacred name of Religion has been too often proſtituted to the moſt deteſtable purpoſes; that furious bigots and bloody perſecutors, and ſelf-intereſted hypocrites of all qualities and dimenſions, from the rapacious leader of an army, to the canting oracle of a congregation, have falſely called themſelves Chriſtians, are melancholy and humi-

* Title of Attila king of the Huns, whoſe deſolating ravages are well known.

liating

CHAP. III.

liating truths, which (as none ſo deeply lament them) none will more readily admit, than they who beſt underſtand the nature of Chriſtianity, and are moſt concerned for her honour. We are ready to acknowledge alſo without diſpute, that the religious affections, and the doctrine of divine aſſiſtance, have at all times been more or leſs diſgraced by the falſe pretences and extravagant conduct of wild fanatics and brain-ſick enthuſiaſts. All this, however, is only as it happens in other inſtances, wherein the depravity of man perverts the bounty of God. Why is it here only to be made an argument, that there is danger of abuſe? So is there alſo in the caſe of every operative principle, whether in the natural or moral world. Take for an inſtance the powers and properties of matter. Theſe were doubtleſs deſigned by Providence for our comfort and well-being; yet they are often miſapplied to trifling purpoſes, and ſtill more frequently turned into ſo many agents of miſery and death. On this fact indeed is founded the well-known maxim, not more trite than juſt, that "the beſt things when corrupted become the worſt;" a maxim which is peculiarly juſt in the inſtance of Religion. For in this caſe it is not merely, as in ſome others, that a great power, when miſchievouſly

Digitized by Google

ouſly applied, muſt be hurtful in proportion to its ſtrength; but that the very principle on which in general we depend for reſtraining and retarding the progreſs of evil, not only ceaſes to interpoſe any kindly check, but is powerfully active in the oppoſite direction. But will you therefore diſcard Religion altogether? It is upon this very ground that the Infidels of a neighbouring country have lately made war againſt Chriſtianity, with what effects the world has not now to learn. But ſuppoſe Religion were diſcarded, then Liberty remains to plague the world; a power which though when well employed, the diſpenſer of light and happineſs, has been often proved, and eminently in the inſtance of a neighbouring country, to be capable, when abuſed, of becoming infinitely miſchievous. Well then, extinguiſh Liberty. Then what more abuſed by falſe pretenders, than Patriotiſm? Well, extinguiſh Patriotiſm. But then the wicked career to which we have adverted, muſt have been checked but for Courage. Blot out Courage —and ſo might you proceed to extinguiſh one by one, Reaſon, and Speech, and Memory, and all the diſcriminating prerogatives of man. But perhaps more than enough has been already urged in reply to an objection,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

which is built on ground ſo indefenſible, as that which would equally warrant our condemning any phyſical or moral faculty altogether, on account of its being occaſionally abuſed.

As to the poſition of our Opponent, that there is no way whereby the validity of any pretenſions to the religious affections may be aſcertained; it muſt partly be admitted. Doubtleſs we are not able always to read the hearts of men, and to diſcover their real characters; and hence it is, that we in ſome meaſure lie open to the falſe and hypocritical pretences which are brought forward againſt us ſo triumphantly. But then theſe pretences no more prove all ſimilar claims to be founded in falſehood and hypocriſy, than there having been many falſe and intereſted pretenders to wiſdom and honeſty, would prove that there can be no ſuch thing as a wiſe or an honeſt man. We do not argue thus but where our reaſon is under a corrupt bias. Why ſhould we be ſo much ſurpriſed and ſcandalized, when theſe impoſtors are detected in the church of Chriſt? It is no more than our Bleſſed Maſter himſelf taught us to expect; and when the old difficulty is ſtated, "didſt thou not ſow good ſeed in thy "field,

Digitized by Google

" field, whence then hath it tares?" his own answer furnishes the best solution—" an ene- " my hath done this."—Hypocrisy is indeed *detestable*, and enthusiasm sufficiently mischievous to justify our guarding against its approaches with jealous care. Yet it may not be improper to take this occasion for observing, that we are now and then apt to draw too unfavourable conclusions from unpleasant appearances, which may perhaps be chiefly or altogether owing to gross or confused conceptions, or to a disgusting formality of demeanor, or to indeterminate, low, or improperly familiar expressions. The mode and language, in which a vulgar man will express himself on the subject of Religion, will probably be vulgar, and it is difficult for people of literature and refinement not to be unreasonably shocked by such vulgarities. But we should at least endeavour to correct the rash judgements which we may be disposed to form on these occasions, and should learn to recognize and to prize a sound texture and just configuration, though disguised beneath a homely or uncouth drapery. It was an Apostle who declared that he had come to the learned and accomplished Grecians " not with excellency " of speech, or the wisdom of words." From these he had studiously abstained, lest he should

SECT. I.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

have seemed to owe his success rather to the graces of oratory, than to the efficacy of his doctrines, and to the divine power with which they were accompanied. Even in our own times, when, the extraordinary operations and miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit having ceased, the necessity of study and preparation, and of attention to manner as well as matter, in order to qualify men to become teachers of religion, are no longer superseded, yet it is no more than an act of justice explicitly to remark, that a body of Christians, which from the peculiarly offensive grossnesses of language in use among them, had, not without reason, excited suspicions of the very worst nature, have since reclaimed their character *(b)*, and have perhaps excelled all mankind in solid and unequivocal proofs of the love of Christ, and of the most ardent, and active, and patient zeal in his service. It is a zeal tempered with prudence, softened with meekness, soberly aiming at great ends by the gradual operation of well adapted means, supported by a courage which no danger can intimidate, and a quiet constancy which no hardships can exhaust.

(b) Vide the testimony of West India merchants to the Moravians, in the Report of the Privy Council on the Slave Trade.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.

On the Admiſſion of the Paſſions into Religion.

THE objection of our Opponent, that by inſiſting on the obligation of making our bleſſed Saviour the object of our religious affections, we are degrading the worſhip of the underſtanding, and are ſubſtituting a ſet of mere feelings in its ſtead, is one which deſerves our moſt ſerious conſideration. If it be juſt, it is deciſive; for ours muſt be unqueſtionably "a reaſonable ſervice *." The Objector muſt mean, either, that theſe affections are unreaſonable in themſelves, or that they are miſplaced in religion. He can ſcarcely, however, intend that the affections are in their own nature unreaſonable. To ſuppoſe him to maintain this poſition, were to ſuppoſe him ignorant of what every ſchool-boy knows of the mechaniſm of the human mind. We ſhall therefore take it for granted, that this cannot be his meaning, and proceed to examine the latter part of the alternative. Here alſo it may either be intended, that the affections are miſplaced in Religion, *generally*, SECT. II.

* Rom. xii. 1.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

or that our bleſſed Saviour is not the proper object of them.

THIS notion of the affections being out of place in Religion, is indeed an opinion which appears to be generally prevalent. The affections are regarded as the ſtrong holds of enthuſiaſm. It is therefore judged moſt expedient to act, as prudent generals are uſed to do, when they raze the fortreſs, or ſpike up the cannon, which are likely to fall into the hands of an enemy. Mankind are apt to be the dupes of miſapplied terms; and the progreſs of the perſuaſion now in queſtion, has been conſiderably aided by an abuſe of language, not ſufficiently checked in its firſt advances, whereby that ſpecies of Religion which is oppoſite to the warm and affectionate kind, has been ſuffered almoſt without diſturbance, to uſurp to itſelf the epithet of *rational*. But let not this claim be too haſtily admitted. Let the poſition in queſtion be thoroughly and impartially diſcuſſed, and it will appear, if I miſtake not, to be a groſs and pernicious error. If amputation be indeed indiſpenſable, we muſt ſubmit to it; but we may ſurely expect to be heard with patience, or rather with favour and indulgence, while we proceed to ſhew that there is no need

Digitized by Google

need to have recourſe to ſo deſperate a remedy. The diſcuſſion will neceſſarily draw us into length. But our prolixity will not be greater than may well be claimed by the importance of the ſubject, eſpecially as it ſcarcely ſeems to have hitherto ſufficiently engaged the attention of writers on the ſubject of Religion. SECT. II.

It cannot methinks but afford a conſiderable preſumption againſt the doctrine which we are about to combat, that it propoſes to exclude at once from the ſervice of Religion ſo grand a part of the compoſition of man; that in this our nobleſt employment it condemns as worſe than uſeleſs, all the moſt active principles of our nature. One cannot but ſuppoſe that like the organs of the body, ſo the elementary qualities and original paſſions of the mind were all given us for valuable purpoſes by our allwiſe Creator. It is indeed one of the ſad evidences of our fallen condition, that they are now perpetually rebelling againſt the powers of reaſon and conſcience, to which they ſhould be ſubject. But even if Revelation had been ſilent, natural reaſon might have in ſome degree preſumed, that it would be the effect of a Religion which ſhould come from God, completely to repair

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

the conſequences of our ſuperinduced depravity. The ſchemes of mere human wiſdom had indeed tacitly confeſſed, that this was a taſk beyond their ſtrength. Of the two moſt celebrated ſyſtems of philoſophy, the one expreſsly confirmed the uſurpation of the paſſions; while the other, deſpairing of being able to regulate them, ſaw nothing left but their extinction. The former acted like a weak government, which gives independence to a rebellious province, which it cannot reduce. The latter formed its boaſted ſcheme merely upon the plan of that barbarous policy, which compoſes the troubles of a turbulent land by the extermination of its inhabitants. This is the calm, not of order, but of inaction; it is not tranquillity, but the ſtillneſs of death;

> Trucidare falſo nomine imperium, & ubi ſolitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant —

Chriſtianity, we might hope, would not be driven to any ſuch wretched expedients; nor in fact does ſhe condeſcend to them. They only thus undervalue her ſtrength, who miſtake her character, and are ignorant of her powers. It is her peculiar glory, and her main office, to bring all the faculties of our nature into their juſt ſubordination and dependence;

Digitized by Google

pendence; that ſo the whole man, complete in all his functions, may be reſtored to the true ends of his being, and be devoted, entire and harmonious, to the ſervice and glory of God. "My ſon, give me thine *heart*"—"Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all "thy *heart*:"—Such are the direct and comprehenſive claims which are made on us in the holy Scriptures. We can ſcarcely indeed look into any part of the ſacred volume without meeting abundant proofs, that it is the religion of the Affections which God particularly requires. Love, Zeal, Gratitude, Joy, Hope, Truſt, are each of them ſpecified; and are not allowed to us as weakneſſes, but enjoined on us as our bounden duty, and commended to us as our acceptable worſhip. Where paſſages are ſo numerous, there would be no end of particular citations. Let it be ſufficient, therefore, to refer the reader to the word of God. There let him obſerve too, that as the lively exerciſe of the paſſions towards their legitimate object, is always ſpoken of with praiſe, ſo a cold, hard, unfeeling heart is repreſented as highly criminal. Lukewarmneſs is ſtated to be the object of God's diſguſt and averſion; zeal and love, of his favour and delight; and the taking away of the heart of ſtone and the implanting

SECT. II.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

planting of a warmer and more tender nature in its ſtead, is ſpecifically promiſed as the effect of his returning favour, and the work of his renewing grace. It is the prayer of an inſpired teacher, in behalf of thoſe for whom he was moſt intereſted, "that their "love" (already acknowledged to be great) "might abound yet more and more:" Thoſe modes of worſhip are preſcribed, which are beſt calculated to excite the dormant affections, and to maintain them in lively exerciſe; and the aids of muſic and ſinging are expreſsly ſuperadded to increaſe their effect. If we look to the moſt eminent of the Scripture Characters, we ſhall find them warm, zealous, and affectionate. When engaged in their favourite work of celebrating the goodneſs of their Supreme Benefactor, their ſouls appear to burn within them, their hearts kindle into rapture; the powers of language are inadequate to the expreſſion of their tranſports; and they call on all nature to ſwell the chorus, and to unite with them in hallelujahs of gratitude, and joy, and praiſe. The man after God's own heart moſt of all abounds in theſe glowing effuſions; and his compoſitions appear to have been given us in order to ſet the tone, as it were, to all ſucceeding generations. Accordingly (to quote the

words

Digitized by Google

words of a late excellent prelate *, who was himſelf warmed with the ſame heavenly flame) " in the language of this divine book, " the praiſes of the church have been offered " up to the Throne of Grace from age to " age." When God was pleaſed to check the future Apoſtle of the Gentiles in his wild career, and to make him a monument of transforming grace; was the force of his affections diminiſhed, or was it not that their direction only was changed? He brought his affections entire and unabated into the ſervice of his bleſſed Maſter. His zeal now burned even with an increaſe of brightneſs; and no intenſeneſs, no continuance of ſufferings could allay its ardor, or damp the fervors of his triumphant exultations. Finally —The worſhip and ſervice of the glorified ſpirits in Heaven, is not repreſented to us a cold intellectual inveſtigation, but as the worſhip and ſervice of gratitude and love. And ſurely it will not be diſputed, that it ſhould be even here the humble endeavour of thoſe who are promiſed while on earth " to " be made meet to be partakers of the inhe- " ritance of the ſaints in light," to bring their hearts into a capacity for joining in thoſe everlaſting praiſes.

SECT. II.

* Dr. HORNE.

BUT

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

True Teſt and Meaſure of the religious Affections.

BUT it may not be unadviſable for the writer here to guard againſt a miſtaken ſuppoſition, from which the mind of our Objector, by no means appears exempt, that the force of the religious affections is to be chiefly eſtimated by the degree of mere animal fervor, by ardors, and tranſports, and raptures, of which, from conſtitutional temperament, a perſon may be eaſily ſuſceptible; or into which daily experience muſt convince us, that people of ſtrong imaginations and of warm paſſions may work themſelves without much difficulty, where their hearts are by no means truly or deeply intereſted. Every tolerable actor can atteſt the truth of this remark. Theſe high degrees of the paſſions bad men may experience, good men may want. They may be affected; they may be genuine; but whether genuine or affected, they form not the true ſtandard by which the real nature or ſtrength of the religious affections is to be determined. To aſcertain theſe points, we muſt examine, whether they appear to be grounded in knowledge, to have their root in ſtrong and juſt conceptions of the great and manifold excellences of their object, or to be ignorant, unmeaning, or vague: whether they are natural and eaſy, or conſtrained and forced; wakeful and apt to

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

to fix on their great objects, delighting in their proper nutriment the exercises of prayer, of praise, and religious contemplation; or voluntarily omitting offered occasions of receiving it, looking forward to them with little expectation, looking back on them with little complacency, and being disappointed of them with little regret: we must observe whether these religious affections are merely occasional visitants, or the abiding inmates of the soul: whether they have got the mastery over the vicious passions and propensities, with which in their origin, and nature, and tendency, they are at open variance; or whether if the victory be not yet complete, the war is at least constant, and the breach irreconcilable: whether they moderate and regulate all the inferior appetites and desires which are culpable only in their excess, thus striving to reign in the bosom with a settled undisputed predominance: And we must examine whether, above all, they manifest themselves by prompting to the active discharge of the duties of life, the personal, the domestic, the relative, the professional, the social, and civil duties. Here the wideness of their range and the universality of their influence, will generally serve to distinguish them from those partial efforts of diligence and self-denial, to which

Digitized by Google

which mankind are prompted by ſubordinate motives. All proofs other than this deduced from conduct, are in ſome degree ambiguous. This, this only, whether we argue from Reaſon or from Scripture, is a ſure infallible criterion. From the daily incidents of conjugal and domeſtic life, we learn that a heat of affection occaſionally vehement, but ſuperficial and tranſitory, may conſiſt too well with a courſe of conduct, exhibiting inconteſtable proofs of neglect and unkindneſs. But the paſſion, which alone the Holy Scriptures dignify with the name of Love, is a deep, not a ſuperficial feeling; a fixed and permanent, not an occaſional emotion. It proves the validity of its title, by actions correſponding with its nature, by practical endeavours to gratify the wiſhes and to promote the intereſts of the object of affection. "If a "man love me, he will keep my ſayings." "This is the love of God, that we keep his "commandments." This therefore is the beſt ſtandard by which to try the quality, or, the quality being aſcertained, to eſtimate the ſtrength of the religious affections. Without ſuffering ourſelves to derive too much complacency from tranſient fervors of devotion, we ſhould carefully and frequently prove ourſelves by this leſs dubitable teſt; impartially examining

Digitized by Google

examining our daily conduct; and often comparing our actual, with our poſſible ſervices, the fair amount of our exertions, with our natural or acquired means and opportunities of uſefulneſs. SECT. II.

AFTER this large explanation, the prolixity of which will we truſt be pardoned on account of the importance of the ſubject, and the danger of miſtakes both on the right hand and on the left, we are perfectly ready to concede to the Objector, that the religious affections muſt be expected to be more or leſs lively in different men, and in the ſame man at different times, in proportion to natural tempers, ages, ſituations, and habits of life. But, to found an objection on this ground, would be as unreaſonable as it were altogether to deny the obligation of the precepts, which command us to relieve the neceſſities of the indigent, becauſe the infinitely varying circumſtances of mankind muſt render it impoſſible to ſpecify beforehand the ſum which each individual ought on the whole to allot to this purpoſe, or to fix in every particular inſtance, on any determinate meaſure and mode of contribution. To the one caſe no leſs than to the other, we may apply the maxim of an eminent writer; "An honeſt

"heart

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

"heart is the beſt caſuiſt." He who every where but in Religion is warm and animated, there only phlegmatic and cold, can hardly expect (eſpecially if this coldneſs be not the ſubject of unfeigned humiliation and ſorrow) that his plea on the ground of natural temper ſhould be admitted; any more than that of a perſon who ſhould urge his poverty as a juſtification of his not relieving the wants of the neceſſitous, at the very time that he ſhould be launching out into expence without reſtraint, on occaſions in which he ſhould be really prompted by his inclinations. In both caſes, "it is the *willing* mind which is re-"quired." Where that is found "every "man will be judged according to what he "hath, and not according to what he hath "not *."

AFTER the deciſive proofs already adduced from the word of God, of the unreaſonableneſs of the objection to the admiſſion of the paſſions into Religion, all farther arguments may appear ſuperfluous to any one who is diſpoſed to bow to ſcriptural authority. Yet the point is of ſo much importance, and, it is to be feared, ſo little regarded, that it may

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

not

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

not be amiſs to continue the diſcuſſion. The beſt concluſions of reaſon will be ſhewn to fall in with what clearly appears to be the authoritative language of revelation; and to call in the aid of the affections to the ſervice of Religion, will prove to be not only what ſober reaſon may permit, as in ſome ſort allowable; but to be that which ſhe clearly and ſtrongly dictates to our deliberate judgements, as being what the circumſtances of our natural condition indiſpenſably require. We have every one of us a work to accompliſh, wherein our eternal intereſts are at ſtake; a work to which we are naturally indiſpoſed. We live in a world abounding with objects which diſtract our attention and divert our endeavours; and a deadly enemy is ever at hand to ſeduce and beguile us. If we perſevere indeed, ſucceſs is certain; but our efforts muſt know no remiſſion. There is a call on us for vigorous and continual reſolution, ſelf-denial, and activity. Now, man is not a being of mere intellect.

The affections not merely allowable in Religion, but highly neceſſary.

Video meliora proboque, deteriora ſequor,

is a complaint which, alas! we all of us might daily utter. The ſlighteſt ſolicitation of appetite is often able to draw us to act in oppoſition to our cleareſt judgement, our

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

higheſt intereſts, and moſt reſolute determinations. Sickneſs, poverty, diſgrace, and even eternal miſery itſelf, ſometimes in vain ſolicit our regards; they are all excluded from the view, and thruſt as it were beyond the ſphere of viſion, by ſome poor unſubſtantial tranſient object, ſo minute and contemptible as almoſt to eſcape the notice of the eye of reaſon.

THESE obſervations are more ſtrikingly confirmed in our religious concerns than in any other; becauſe in them the intereſts at ſtake are of tranſcendant importance: but they hold equally in every inſtance according to its meaſure, wherein there is a call for laborious, painful, and continued exertions, from which we are likely to be deterred by obſtacles, or ſeduced by the ſolicitations of pleaſure. What then is to be done in the caſe of any ſuch arduous and neceſſary undertaking? The anſwer is obvious—You ſhould endeavour not only to convince the underſtanding, but alſo to affect the heart; and for this end, you muſt ſecure the reinforcement of the paſſions. This is indeed the courſe which would be naturally followed by every man of common underſtanding, who ſhould know that ſome one for whom he was deeply

Digitized by Google

deeply intereſted, a child, for inſtance, or a brother, were about to enter on a long, difficult, perilous, and critical adventure, wherein ſucceſs was to be honour and affluence; defeat was to be contempt and ruin. And ſtill more, if the parent were convinced that his child poſſeſſed faculties which, ſtrenuouſly and unremittingly exerted, would prove equal to all the exigencies of the enterprize, but knew him alſo to be volatile and inconſtant, and had reaſon to doubt his reſolution and his vigilance; how would the friendly monitor's endeavour be redoubled, ſo to poſſeſs his pupil's mind with the worth and dignity of the undertaking, that there ſhould be no opening for the entrance of any inferior conſideration!—"Weigh well (he would ſay) "the value of the object for which you are "about to contend, and contemplate and "ſtudy its various excellences, till your whole "ſoul be on fire for its acquiſition. Conſider "too, that if you fail, miſery and infamy are "united in the alternative which awaits you. "Let not the miſtaken notion of its being "a ſafe and eaſy ſervice, for a moment be"guile you into the diſcontinuance or re"miſſion of your efforts. Be aware of your "imminent danger, and at the ſame time "know your true ſecurity. It is a ſervice

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

"of labour and peril; but one wherein the "powers which you poſſeſs, ſtrenuouſly and "perſeveringly exerted, cannot but crown "you with victory. Accuſtom yourſelf to "look firſt to the dreadful conſequences of "failure; then fix your eye on the glorious "prize which is before you; and when your "ſtrength begins to fail, and your ſpirits are "well nigh exhauſted, let the animating view "rekindle your reſolution, and call forth in "renewed vigour the fainting energies of "your ſoul."

It was the remark of an unerring obſerver, "The children of this world are wiſer in "their generation than the children of light." And it is indiſputably true, that in religion we have to argue and plead with men for principles of action, the wiſdom and expediency of which are univerſally acknowledged in matters of worldly concern. So it is in the inſtance before us. The caſe which has been juſt deſcribed, is an exact, but a faint repreſentation of our condition in this life. Frail and "infirm of purpoſe," we have a buſineſs to execute of ſupreme and indiſpenſable neceſſity. Solicitations to neglect it every where abound: the difficulties and dangers are numerous and urgent; and the

Digitized by Google

the night of death cometh, how ſoon we know not, "when no man can work." All this is granted. It ſeems to be a ſtate of things wherein one ſhould look out with ſolicitude for ſome powerful ſtimulants. Mere knowledge is confeſſedly too weak. The affections alone remain to ſupply the deficiency. They preciſely meet the occaſion, and ſuit the purpoſes intended. Yet, when we propoſe to fit ourſelves for our great undertaking, by calling them in to our help, we are to be told that we are acting contrary to reaſon. Is this reaſonable, to ſtrip us firſt of our armour of proof, and then to ſend us to the ſharpeſt of encounters? To ſummon us to the ſevereſt labours, but firſt to rob us of the precious cordials which ſhould brace our ſinews and recruit our ſtrength?

LET theſe pretended advocates for reaſon at length then confeſs their folly, and do juſtice to the ſuperior wiſdom as well as goodneſs of our heavenly Inſtructor, who better underſtanding our true condition, and knowing our frowardneſs and inadvertency, has moſt reaſonably as well as kindly pointed out and enjoined on us the uſe of thoſe aids which may counteract our infirmities; who commanding the effect, has commanded alſo the means whereby it may be accompliſhed.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

Christ the juſt object of our warm affections.

AND now, if the uſe of the affections in religion, in *general*, be at length ſhewn to be conformable to reaſon, it will not require many words to prove that our bleſſed Saviour is the proper object of them. We know that love, gratitude, joy, hope, truſt, have all their appropriate objects. Now it muſt be at once conceded, that if theſe appropriate objects be not exhibited, it is perfectly unreaſonable to expect that the correſpondent paſſions ſhould be excited. If we aſk for love, in the caſe of an object which has no excellence or deſirableneſs; for gratitude, where no obligation has been conferred; for joy, where there is no juſt cauſe of ſelf-congratulation; for hope, where nothing is expected; for truſt, where there exiſts no ground of reliance; then, indeed, we muſt kiſs the rod, and patiently ſubmit to correction. This would be indeed Egyptian bondage, to demand the effects without the means of producing them. Is the caſe then ſo? Are we ready to adopt the language of the avowed enemies of our adorable Saviour; and again to ſay of him "in whom dwelleth all the fulneſs of the "Godhead bodily," that "he hath no form "nor comelineſs; and when we ſhall ſee him, "there is no beauty that we ſhould deſire "him *?" Is it no obligation, that he who

* Iſaiah, liii. 2.

"thought

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

" thought it not robbery to be equal with " God," ſhould yet for our ſakes " make " himſelf of no reputation, and take upon " him the form of a ſervant, and be made in " the likeneſs of men; and humble himſelf, " and become obedient unto death, even the " death of the croſs *?" Is it no cauſe of " *joy*, that to us is born a Saviour †," by whom we may " be delivered from the power of " darkneſs; and be made meet to be par- " takers of the inheritance of the ſaints in " light ‡"? Can there be a " *hope* comparable " to that of our calling §"—" Which is Chriſt " in us, the hope of glory ¶?" Can there be a *truſt* to be preferred to the reliance on " Chriſt Jeſus; who is the ſame yeſterday, " to-day, and for ever **?" Surely, if our Opponent be not dead to every generous emotion, he cannot look his own objection in the face, without a bluſh of ſhame and indignation.

* Philip. ii. 6, 7, 8. ‡ Col. i. 12, 13. ¶ Col. i. 27.
† Luke, ii. 10, 11. § Epheſ. i. 18. ** Heb. xiii. 8.



Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

SECTION III.

Consideration of the Reasonableness of Affections towards an invisible Being.

The Affections denied to be possible towards an invisible Being.

BUT forced at last to retreat from his favourite position, and compelled to acknowledge that the religious affections towards our blessed Saviour are not unreasonable; the Objector still maintains the combat, suggesting that by the very constitution of our nature, we are not susceptible of them towards an invisible Being; with regard to whom, it is added, we are shut out from all those means of communication and intercourse, which knit and cement the union between man and man.

The above Position discussed, and answered.

WE mean not to deny that there is something in this objection. It might even seem to plead the authority of Scripture in its favour—"He that loveth not his brother whom "he hath seen, how can he love God whom "he hath not seen*?" And it was indeed no new remark in Horace's days,

* 1 John, iv. 20.

Segnius

Segnius irritant animos demiſſa per aures,
Quam quæ ſunt oculis ſubjecta fidelibus.

SECT. III.

We receive impreſſions more readily from viſible objects, we feel them more ſtrongly, and retain them more durably. But though it muſt be granted that this circumſtance makes it a more difficult taſk to preſerve the affections in queſtion in a healthful and vigorous ſtate; is it thereby rendered impoſſible? This were indeed a moſt precipitate concluſion; and any one who ſhould be diſpoſed to admit the truth of it, might be at leaſt induced to heſitate, when he ſhould reflect that the argument applies equally againſt the poſſibility of the love of God, a duty of which the moſt curſory reader of Scripture, if he admit its divine authority, cannot but acknowledge the indiſpenſable obligation. But we need only look back to the Scripture proofs which have been already adduced, to be convinced that the religious affections are therein inculcated on us, as a matter of high and ſerious obligation. Hence we may be aſſured that the impoſſibility ſtated by our Opponent does not exiſt.

Let us ſcrutinize this matter, however, a little more minutely, and we ſhall be com-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

pelled to acknowledge, that the objection vaniſhes when we fairly and accurately inveſtigate the circumſtances of the caſe. With this view, let us look a little into the nature of the affections of the human mind, and endeavour to aſcertain whence it is that they derive their nutriment, and are found from experience to increaſe in ſtrength.

THE ſtate of man is ſuch, that his feelings are not the obedient ſervants of his reaſon, prompt at once to follow its dictates, as to their direction, and their meaſure. Excellence is the juſt object of love; good in expectancy, of hope; evil to be apprehended, of fear; the misfortunes and ſufferings of our fellow-creatures, conſtitute the juſt objects of pity. Each of theſe paſſions, it might be thought, would be excited, in proportion to what our reaſon ſhould inform us were the magnitude and conſequent claims of its correſponding object. But this is by no means the caſe. Take firſt for a proof the inſtance of pity. We read of ſlaughtered thouſands with leſs emotion, than we hear the particulars of a ſhocking accident which has happened in the next ſtreet; the diſtreſſes of a novel, which at the ſame time we know to be fictitious, affect us more than the dry narrative

Digitized by Google

rative of a battle. We become ſo much intereſted by theſe incidents of the imagination that we cannot ſpeedily baniſh them from our thoughts, nor recover the tone of our minds; and often, we ſcarcely bring ourſelves to lay down our book at the call of real misfortune, of which perhaps we go to the relief, on a principle of duty, but with little ſenſe of intereſt or emotion of tenderneſs. It were eaſy to ſhew that it is much the ſame in the caſe of the other affections. Whatever be the cauſe of this diſproportion, which (as metaphyſics fall not within our province) we ſhall not ſtop to examine, the fact is undeniable. There appears naturally to be a certain ſtrangeneſs between the paſſion and its object, which familiarity and the power of habit muſt gradually overcome. You muſt contrive to bring them into *cloſe contact*; they muſt be jointed and glued together by the particularities of little incidents. Thus in the production of heat in the phyſical world, the flint and the ſteel produce not the effect without colliſion; the rudeſt Barbarian will tell us the neceſſity of attrition, and the chemiſt of mixture. Now, an object, it is admitted, is brought into *cloſer contact* with its correſponding paſſion, by being ſeen and converſed with. This we grant

SECT. III.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

grant is one way; but does it follow that there is no other? To aſſert this, would be ſomething like maintaining, in contradiction to univerſal experience, that objects of viſion alone are capable of attracting our regard. But nothing can be more unfounded than ſuch a ſuppoſition. It might ſeem too near an approach to the ludicrous, to ſuggeſt as an example to the contrary, the metaphyſician's attachment to his unſubſtantial ſpeculations, or the zeal diſplayed in the purſuit,

Extra flammantia mœnia mundi,

of abſtract ſciences, where there is no idea of bringing them "within the viſible diurnal "ſphere" to the vulgarity of practical application. The inſtance of novel reading proves, that we may be extremely affected by what we know to be merely ideal incidents and beings. By much thinking or talking of any one; by uſing our minds to dwell on his excellences; by placing him in imaginary ſituations which intereſt and affect us; we find ourſelves becoming inſenſibly more and more attached to him: whereas it is the ſureſt expedient for extinguiſhing an attachment which already exiſts, to engage in ſuch occupations or ſociety, as may cauſe our caſual

Digitized by Google

ſual thoughts and more fixed meditations to be diverted from the object of it. Aſk a mother who has been long ſeparated from her child, eſpecially if he has been in circumſtances of honour, or of danger, to draw her attention to him, and to keep it in wakefulneſs and exerciſe, and ſhe will tell you, that ſo far from becoming leſs dear, he appears to have grown more the object of her affections. She ſeems to herſelf to love him even better than the child who has been living under her roof, and has been daily in her view. How does ſhe rejoice in his good fortune, and weep over his diſtreſſes! With what impatience does ſhe anticipate the time of his return!

SECT. III.

We find therefore that ſight and perſonal intercourſe do not ſeem neceſſary to the production or increaſe of attachment, where the means of *cloſe contact* have been afforded; but on the other hand, if an object have been prevented from coming into *cloſe contact*, ſight and perſonal intercourſe are not ſufficient to give it the power of exciting the affections in proportion to its real magnitude. Suppoſe the caſe of a perſon whom we have often ſeen, and may have occaſionally converſed with, and of whom we have been told in the general, that he poſſeſſes extraordinary merits.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

merits. We assent to the assertion. But if we have no knowledge of particulars, no close acquaintance with him, nothing in short which brings his merits home to us, they interest us less than a far inferior degree of the very same qualities in one of our common associates. A parent has several children, all constantly under his eye, and equally dear to him. Yet if any one of them be taken ill, it is brought into so much *closer contact* than before, that it seems to absorb and engross the parent's whole affection. Thus then, though it will not be denied that an object by being visible may thereby excite its corresponding affection with more facility; yet this is manifestly far from being the prime consideration. And so far are we from being the slaves of the sense of vision, that a familiar acquaintance with the intrinsic excellences of an object, aided, it must be admitted, by the power of habit, will render us almost insensible to the impressions which its outward form conveys, and able entirely to lose the consciousness of an unsightly exterior.

We may be permitted to remark, that the foregoing observations furnish an explanation,

Digitized by Google

tion, leſs diſcreditable than that which has been ſometimes given, of an undoubted phænomenon in the human mind, that the greateſt public misfortunes, however the underſtanding may lecture, are apt really to affect our feelings leſs than the moſt trivial diſaſter which happens to ourſelves. An eminent writer *(a)* ſcarcely overſtated the point when he obſerved, " that it would occaſion a man " of humanity more real diſturbance to know " that he was the next morning to loſe his " little finger, than to hear that the great " empire of China had been ſuddenly ſwal- " lowed up by an earthquake. The thoughts " of the former, would keep him awake all " night; in the latter caſe, after making many " melancholy reflections on the precarioufneſs of human life, and the vanity of all " the labours of man which could be thus " annihilated in a moment; after a little " ſpeculation too perhaps on the cauſes of " the diſaſter, and its effects in the political " and commercial world; he would purſue " his buſineſs or his pleaſure with the ſame " eaſe and tranquillity as if no ſuch accident " had happened; and ſnore at night with " the moſt profound ſerenity over the ruin,

(a) Dr. ADAM SMITH. Vide Theory of Moral Sentiments.

" of

CHAP. III.

"of a hundred million of his fellow-crea-
"tures. Selfiſhneſs is not the cauſe of this,
"for the moſt unfeeling brute on earth would
"ſurely think nothing of the loſs of a finger,
"if he could thereby prevent ſo dreadful a
"calamity." This doctrine of *contact* which has been opened above, affords a ſatisfactory ſolution; and from all that has been ſaid the circumſtances, by which the affections of the mind towards any particular object are generated and ſtrengthened, may be eaſily collected. The chief of theſe appear to be, whatever tends to give a diſtinct and lively impreſſion of the object, by ſetting before us its minute parts, and by often drawing towards it the thoughts and affections, ſo as to inveſt it by degrees with a confirmed aſcendency: whatever tends to excite and to keep in exerciſe a lively intereſt in its behalf: in other words; full knowledge, diſtinct and frequent mental entertainment, and pathetic contemplations. Suppoſing theſe means to have been uſed in any given degree, it may be expected, that they will be more or leſs efficacious, in proportion as the intrinſic qualities of the object afford greater or leſs ſcope for their operation, and more or fewer materials with which to work. Can it then be conceived, that they will be of no avail when

Digitized by Google

when ſteadily practiſed in the caſe of our Redeemer! If the principles of love and gratitude, and joy, and hope, and truſt, are not utterly extinct within us, they cannot but be called forth by the various correſponding objects which that bleſſed contemplation would gradually bring forth to our view. Well might the language of the apoſtle be addreſſed to Chriſtians, "Whom having *not* "*ſeen* ye love; in whom, though now ye *ſee* "*him not*, yet believing, ye *rejoice* with joy "unſpeakable, and full of glory *."

SECT. III.

Special Grounds for the religious Affections towards our Saviour.

BUT in the preſent inſtance freſh conſiderations pour in ſtill more to invalidate the plea of its being impoſſible to love an inviſible being. Our bleſſed Saviour, if we may be permitted ſo to ſay, is not removed far from us; and the various relations in which we ſtand towards him, ſeem purpoſely made known to us, in order to furniſh ſo many different bonds of connection with him, and conſequent occaſions of continual intercourſe. He exhibits not himſelf to us "dark with exceſſive "brightneſs," but is let down as it were to the poſſibilities of human converſe. We may not think that he is incapable of entering

* 1. Pet. i. 8.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

into our little concerns, and ſympathizing with them; for we are graciouſly aſſured that he is not one "who cannot be touched with "the feeling of our infirmities, having been "in all points tempted like as we are *." The figures under which he is repreſented, are ſuch as convey ideas of the utmoſt tenderneſs. "He ſhall feed his flock like a ſhep-"herd; he ſhall gather the lambs in his arm, "and carry them in his boſom, and ſhall "gently lead thoſe that are with young †." —"They ſhall not hunger nor thirſt, neither "ſhall the heat nor ſun ſmite them; for he "that hath mercy on them, ſhall lead them, "even by the ſprings of water ſhall he guide "them ‡." "I will not leave you orphans (a)" was one of his laſt conſolatory declarations §. The children of Chriſt are here ſeparated indeed from the perſonal view of him; but not from his paternal affection and paternal care. Meanwhile let them quicken their regards by the animating anticipation of that bleſſed day, when he "who is gone to pre-"pare a place for them, will come again to "receive them unto himſelf." Then ſhall

* Heb. iv. 15.
† Iſaiah, xl. 11.
‡ Iſaiah, xlix. 10.
§ John, xiv. 18.

(a) The word Comfortleſs is rendered in the margin Orphans.

they

Digitized by Google

they be admitted to his more immediate pre- SECT. III.
ſence: "Now we ſee through a glaſs darkly; "but then face to face: now I know in part; "but then ſhall I know, even as I am "known *."

SURELY more than enough has been now ſaid to prove that this particular caſe, from its very nature, furniſhes the moſt abundant and powerful conſiderations and means for exciting the feelings; and it might be contended, without fear of refutation, that by the diligent and habitual uſe of thoſe conſiderations and means, we might with confident expectation of ſucceſs, engage in the work of raiſing our affections towards our bleſſed Saviour to a ſtate of due force and activity. But, bleſſed be God, we have a ſtill better reliance; for the grand circumſtance of all yet remains behind, which the writer has been led to defer, from his wiſh to contend with his opponents on their own ground. This circumſtance is, that here, no leſs than in other particulars, the Chriſtian's hope is founded, not on the ſpeculations or the ſtrength of man, but on the declaration

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

of Him who cannot lie, on the power of Omnipotence.

We learn from the Scriptures that it is one main part of the operations of the Holy Spirit, to implant thoſe heavenly principles in the human mind, and to cheriſh their growth. We are encouraged to believe that in anſwer to our prayers, this aid from above will give efficacy to our earneſt endeavours, if uſed in humble dependence on divine grace. We may therefore with confidence take the means which have been ſuggeſted. But let us, in our turn, be permitted to aſk our opponents, have *they* humbly and perſeveringly applied for this divine ſtrength? or diſclaiming that aſſiſtance, perhaps as tempting them to indolence, have they been ſo much the more ſtrenuous and unwearied in the uſe of their own unaided endeavours? or rather have they not been equally negligent of both? Renouncing the one, they have wholly omitted the other. But this is far from being all. They even reverſe all the methods which we have recommended as being calculated to increaſe regard; and exactly follow that courſe which would be purſued by any one who ſhould wiſh to reduce an exceſſive

Unreaſonable conduct of our Objectors in the preſent Inſtance.

Digitized by Google

ceſſive affection. Yet thus leaving untried all the means, which, whether from Reaſon or Scripture, we maintain to be neceſſary to the production of the end, nay uſing ſuch as are of a directly oppoſite nature, theſe men preſume to talk to us of impoſſibilities! We may rather contend that they furniſh a freſh proof of the ſoundneſs of our reaſonings. We lay it down as a fundamental poſition, that ſpeculative knowledge alone, mere ſuperficial curſory conſiderations, will be of no avail. Nothing is to be done without the diligent continued uſe of the appointed method. They themſelves afford an inſtance of the truth of our aſſertions; and while they ſupply no argument againſt the efficacy of the mode preſcribed, they acknowledge at leaſt that they are wholly ignorant of any other.

SECT. III.

Appeal to fact in proof of our former poſitions.

BUT let us now turn our eyes to Chriſtians of a higher order, to thoſe who have actually proved the truth of our reaſonings; who have not only aſſumed the name, but who have poſſeſſed the ſubſtance, and felt the power of Chriſtianity; who though often foiled by their remaining corruptions, and ſhamed and caſt down under a ſenſe of their many imperfections, have known in their

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

better ſeaſons, what it was to experience its firm hope, its dignified joy, its unſhaken truſt, its more than human conſolations. In their hearts, love alſo towards their Redeemer has glowed; a love not *ſuperficial* and unmeaning but conſtant and rational, reſulting from a ſtrong impreſſion of the worth of its object, and heightened by an abiding ſenſe of great, unmerited, and continually accumulating obligations; ever manifeſting itſelf in acts of diligent obedience, or of patient ſuffering. Such was the religion of the holy martyrs of the ſixteenth century, the illuſtrious ornaments of the Engliſh church. They realized the theory which we have now been faintly tracing. Look to their writings, and you will find that their thoughts and affections had been much exerciſed in habitual views of the bleſſed Jeſus. Thus they uſed the required *means*. What were the *effects*? Perſecution and diſtreſs, degradation and contempt in vain aſſailed them—all theſe evils ſerved but to bring their affections into *cloſer contact* with their object; and not only did their love feel no diminution or abatement, but it roſe to all the exigences of the occaſion, and burned with an increaſe of ardor; and when brought forth at laſt to a cruel and ignominious death, they repined

Digitized by Google

repined not at their fate; but rather rejoiced that they were counted worthy to ſuffer for the name of Chriſt. The writer might refer to ſtill more recent times to prove the reality of this divine principle. But leſt his authorities ſhould be diſputed, let us go to the Apoſtles of our Lord; and while, on a curſory peruſal of their writings, we muſt acknowledge that they commend and even preſcribe to us the love of Chriſt, as one of the chief of the Chriſtian graces; ſo on a more attentive inſpection of thoſe writings, we ſhall diſcover abundant proofs that they were themſelves bright examples of their own precept; that our bleſſed Saviour was really the object of their warmeſt affection, and what he had done and ſuffered for them the continual ſubject of their grateful remembrance.

SECT. III.

Inadequate Conceptions concerning the Holy Spirit's Operations.

THE diſpoſition ſo prevalent in the bulk of nominal Chriſtians, to form a religious ſyſtem for themſelves, inſtead of taking it from the word of God, is ſtrikingly obſervable in their ſcarcely admitting, except in the moſt vague and general ſenſe, the doctrine of

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

the influence of the Holy Spirit. If we look into the Scriptures for information on this particular, we learn a very different leſſon. We are in them diſtinctly taught, that "of "ourſelves we can do nothing;" that "we "are by nature children of wrath," and under the power of the evil ſpirit, our underſtandings being naturally dark, and our hearts averſe from ſpiritual things; and we are directed to pray for the influence of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our underſtandings, to diſſipate our prejudices, to purify our corrupt minds, and to renew us after the image of our heavenly Father. It is this influence which is repreſented as originally awakening us from ſlumber, as enlightening us in darkneſs, as "quickening us when dead *," as "delivering us from the power of the devil," as drawing us to God, as "tranſlating us "into the kingdom of his dear Son †," as "creating us anew in Chriſt Jeſus §," as "dwelling in us, and walking in us ||;" ſo that "putting off the old man with his "deeds," we are to conſider ourſelves as "having put on the new man, which is re-"newed in knowledge after the image of

* Eph. ii. 1. 5.
† Col. i. 13.
§ Epheſ. ii. 10.
|| 2 Cor. vi. 16.

"Him

"Him that created him *;" and as thoſe who are to be "an habitation of God through "the Spirit †." It is by this Divine aſſiſtance only that we can grow in Grace, and improve in all Holineſs. So expreſsly, particularly, and repeatedly does the word of God inculcate theſe leſſons, that one would think there were ſcarcely room for any difference of opinion among thoſe who admit its authority. Sometimes *(a)* the whole of a Chriſtian's repentance and faith, and conſequent holineſs, are aſcribed *generally* to the Divine influence; ſometimes theſe are ſpoken of ſeparately, and aſcribed to the ſame Almighty power. Sometimes different particular graces of the Chriſtian character, thoſe which reſpect our duties and tempers towards our fellow-creatures, no leſs than thoſe which have reference to the Supreme Being, are particularly traced to this ſource. Sometimes they are all referred collectively to this common root, being comprehended under the compendious denomination of "the "Fruits of the Spirit." In exact correſpondence with theſe repreſentations, this aid

* Col. iii. 9, 10. † Epheſ. ii. 22.

(a) Vide Dr. DODDRIDGE's eight Sermons on Regeneration, a moſt valuable compilation; and M'LAURIN's Eſſay on Divine Grace.

from

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

from above is promiſed in other parts of Scripture for the production of thoſe effects; and the withholding or withdrawing of it is occaſionally threatened as a puniſhment for the ſins of men, and as one of the moſt fatal conſequences of the Divine diſpleaſure.

THE Liturgy of the Church of England ſtrictly agrees with the repreſentation, which has been here given of the inſtructions of the word of God.

SECT. IV.

Miſtaken Conceptions entertained by nominal Chriſtians of the terms of acceptance with God.

IF it be true then, that, in contradiction to the plaineſt dictates of Scripture, and to the ritual of our eſtabliſhed Church, the ſanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit, the firſt fruits of our reconciliation to God, the purchaſe of our Redeemer's death, and his beſt gift to his true diſciples, are too generally undervalued and ſlighted; if it be alſo true, that our thoughts of the bleſſed Saviour are confuſed and faint, our affections towards him languid and lukewarm, little proportioned to

what

Digitized by Google

what they, who at ſuch a price have been reſcued from ruin, and endowed with a title to eternal glory, might be juſtly expected to feel towards the Author of that deliverance; little proportioned to what has been felt by others, ranſomed from the ſame ruin, and partakers of the ſame inheritance: if this, let it be repeated, be indeed ſo, let us not ſhut our eyes againſt the perception of our real ſtate; but rather endeavour to trace the evil to its ſource. We are loudly called on to *examine well our foundations*. If any thing be *there* unſound and hollow, the ſuperſtructure could not be ſafe, though its exterior were leſs ſuſpicious. Let the queſtion then be aſked, and let the anſwer be returned with all the conſideration and ſolemnity which a queſtion ſo important may juſtly demand, whether, in the grand concern of all, *the means of a ſinner's acceptance with God*, there be not reaſon to apprehend, that the nominal Chriſtians whom we have been addreſſing, too generally entertain very ſuperficial, and confuſed, if not highly dangerous notions? Is there not cauſe to fear, that with little more than an indiſtinct and nominal reference to Him who "bore our ſins in his "own body on the tree," they really reſt their eternal hopes on a vague, general perſuaſion

SECT. IV.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

ſuaſion of the unqualified mercy of the Supreme Being; or that, ſtill more erroneouſly, they rely in the main, on their own negative or poſitive merits? "They can look upon their "lives with an impartial eye, and congratu- "late themſelves on their inoffenſiveneſs in "ſociety; on their having been exempt, at "leaſt, from any groſs vice, or if ſometimes "accidentally betrayed into it, on its never "having been indulged habitually; or if not "even ſo" (for there are but few who can ſay this, if the term vice be explained according to the ſtrict requiſitions of the Goſpel) "yet on the balance being in their favour, "or on the whole not much againſt them, "when their good and bad actions are fairly "weighed, and due allowance is made for "human frailty." Theſe conſiderations are ſufficient for the moſt part to compoſe their apprehenſions; theſe are the cordials which they find moſt at hand in the moments of ſerious thought, or of occaſional dejection; and ſometimes perhaps in ſeaſons of leſs than ordinary ſelf-complacency, they call in alſo to their aid the general perſuaſion of the unbounded mercy and pity of God. Yet perſons of this deſcription by no means diſclaim a Saviour, or avowedly relinquiſh their title to a ſhare in the benefits of his death. They

cloſe

Digitized by Google

close their petitions with the name of Christ; but if not chiefly from the effect of habit, or out of decent conformity to the established faith, yet surely with something of the same ambiguity of principle which influenced the expiring philosopher, when he ordered the customary mark of homage to be paid to the God of medicine. SECT. IV.

OTHERS go farther than this; for there are many shades of difference between those who flatly renounce, and those who cordially embrace the doctrine of Redemption by Christ. This class has a sort of general, indeterminate, and ill understood dependence on our blessed Saviour. But their hopes, so far as they can be distinctly made out, appear ultimately to rest on the persuasion that they are now, through Christ, become members of a new dispensation, wherein they will be tried by a more lenient rule than that to which they must have been otherwise subject. "God "will not now be extreme to mark what is "done amiss; but will dispense with the "rigorous exactions of his law, too strict in- "deed for such frail creatures as we are to "hope that we can fulfil it. Christianity has "moderated the requisitions of Divine Jus- "tice; and all that is now required of us, is "thankfully

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

"thankfully to truſt to the merits of Chriſt for "the pardon of our ſins, and the acceptance "of our ſincere though imperfect obedience. "The frailties and infirmities to which our "nature is liable, or to which our ſituation "in life expoſes us, will not be ſeverely "judged: and as it is practice that really de- "termines the character, we may reſt ſatiſ- "fied, that if on the whole our lives be to- "lerably good, we ſhall eſcape with little or "no puniſhment, and through Jeſus Chriſt "our Lord, ſhall be finally partakers of hea- "venly felicity."

We cannot dive into the human heart, and therefore ſhould always ſpeak with caution and diffidence, when from external appearances or declarations we are affirming the exiſtence of any internal principles and feelings; eſpecially as we are liable to be miſled by the ambiguities of language, or by the inaccuracy with which others may expreſs themſelves. But it is ſometimes not difficult to any one who is accuſtomed, if the phraſe may be allowed, to the anatomy of the human mind, to diſcern, that generally ſpeaking, the perſons who uſe the above language, rely not ſo much on the merits of Chriſt, and on the agency of Divine Grace, as

Digitized by Google

as on their own power of fulfilling the moderated requiſitions of Divine Juſtice. He will hence therefore diſcover in them a diſpoſition rather to extenuate the malignity of their diſeaſe, than to magnify the excellence of the proffered remedy. He will find them apt to palliate in themſelves what they cannot fully juſtify, to enhance the merit of what they believe to be their good qualities and commendable actions, to ſet as it were in an account the good againſt the bad; and if the reſult be not very unfavourable, they conceive that they ſhall be entitled to claim the benefits of our Saviour's ſufferings as a thing of courſe. They have little idea, ſo little, that it might almoſt be affirmed that they have no idea at all, of the importance or difficulty of the duty of what the Scripture calls "ſubmitting ourſelves to the righteouſneſs of God;" or of our proneneſs rather to juſtify ourſelves in his ſight, than in the language of imploring penitents to acknowledge ourſelves guilty and helpleſs ſinners. They have never ſummoned themſelves to this entire and unqualified renunciation of their own merits, and their own ſtrength; and therefore they remain ſtrangers to the natural loftineſs of the human heart, which ſuch a call would have awakened into action, and rouſed to

SECT. IV.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

to reſiſtance. ALL THESE THEIR SEVERAL ERRORS NATURALLY RESULT FROM THE MISTAKEN CONCEPTION ENTERTAINED OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY. They conſider not that Chriſtianity is a ſcheme for "juſtifying *the ungodly* *," by Chriſt's dying for them "*when yet ſinners* † *(a)*:" a ſcheme for reconciling us to God—*when enemies*;" and for making the fruits of holineſs *the effects* ‡, *not the cauſe*, of our being juſtified and reconciled: that, in ſhort, it opens freely the door of mercy, to the greateſt and beſt of penitent ſinners; who obeying the bleſſed impulſe of the grace

Prevailing fundamental miſconception of the ſcheme and eſſential principle of the Goſpel.

* Rom. iv. 5. † Ibid. v. 6—8.

(*a*) The Writer truſts he cannot be miſunderſtood to mean that any, continuing ſinners and ungodly, can, by believing, be accepted, or finally ſaved. The following chapter, particularly the latter part of it, (Section vi.) would abundantly vindicate him from any ſuch miſconſtruction. Meanwhile, he will only remark, that true faith (in which repentance is conſidered as involved) is in Scripture regarded as *the radical principle of holineſs*. If the root exiſt, the proper fruits will be brought forth. An attention to this conſideration would have eaſily explained and reconciled thoſe paſſages of St. Paul's and St. James's Epiſtles, which have furniſhed ſo much matter of argument and criticiſm. St. James, it may be obſerved, all along ſpeaks not of a man, who *has* faith, but who *ſays* that he has faith. Vide James ii. 14. &c. &c.

‡ Vide Ch. iv. Sect. vi.

of

Digitized by Google

SECT. IV.

of God, whereby they had been awakened from the ſleep of death, and moved to ſeek for pardon, may enter in, and through the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit be enabled to bring forth the fruits of Righteouſneſs. But they rather conceive of Chriſtianity as opening the door of mercy, that thoſe who on the ground of their own merits could not have hoped to juſtify themſelves before God, may yet be admitted for Chriſt's ſake, on condition of their having previouſly ſatisfied the moderated requiſitions of Divine Juſtice. In ſpeaking to others alſo of the Goſpel ſcheme, they are apt to talk too much of terms and performances on our part, on which we become entitled to an intereſt in the ſufferings of Chriſt; inſtead of ſtating the benefits of Chriſt's ſatisfaction as extended to us freely, "without money and "without price."

Some practical conſequences of the fundamental error above pointed out.

THE *practical* conſequences of theſe errors are ſuch as might be expected. They tend to prevent that ſenſe which we ought to entertain of our own natural miſery and helpleſſneſs; and that deep feeling of gratitude for the merits and interceſſion of Chriſt, to which we are wholly indebted for our reconciliation to God, and for the will and the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

power, from first to last, to work out our own salvation. They consider it too much in the light of a contract between two parties, wherein each, independently of the other, has his own distinct condition to perform; man—to do his duty; God—to justify and accept for Christ's sake: If they fail not in the discharge of their condition, assuredly the condition on God's part will be faithfully fulfilled. Accordingly, we find in fact, that they who represent the Gospel scheme in the manner above described, give evidence of the subject with which their hearts are most filled, by their proneness to run into merely moral disquisitions, either not mentioning at all, or at least but cursorily touching on the sufferings and love of their Redeemer; and are little apt to kindle at their Saviour's name, and like the apostles to be betrayed by their fervor into what may be almost an untimely descant on the riches of his unutterable mercy. In addressing others also whom they conceive to be living in habits of sin, and under the wrath of God, they rather advise them to amend their ways as a preparation for their coming to Christ, than exhort them to throw themselves with deep prostration of soul at the foot of the cross, there to obtain

Digitized by Google

tain pardon and find grace to help in time of need. SECT. IV.

THE great importance of the ſubject in queſtion will juſtify the writer in having been thus particular. It has ariſen from a wiſh that on a matter of ſuch magnitude, it ſhould be impoſſible to miſtake his meaning. But after all that has been ſaid, let it alſo be remembered, that except ſo far as the inſtruction of others is concerned, the point of importance is, the internal diſpoſition of the mind; and it is to be hoped that a dependance for pardon and holineſs may be placed where it ought to be, notwithſtanding the vague manner in which men expreſs themſelves. Let us alſo hope that he who ſearches the heart, ſees the right diſpoſitions in many who uſe the miſtaken and dangerous language to which we have objected.

IF the preceding ſtatement of the error ſo generally prevalent concerning the nature of the Goſpel offer be in any conſiderable degree juſt; it will then explain that languor in the affections towards our bleſſed Saviour, together with that inadequate impreſſion of the neceſſity and value of the aſſiſtance of the divine Spirit, which ſo generally prevail.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

According to the ſoundeſt principles of reaſoning, it may be alſo adduced as an additional proof of the correctneſs of our preſent ſtatement, that it ſo exactly falls in with thoſe phænomena, and ſo naturally accounts for them. For even admitting that the perſons above mentioned, particularly the laſt claſs, do at the bottom rely on the atonement of Chriſt; yet on their ſcheme, it muſt neceſſarily happen, that the object to which they are moſt accuſtomed to look, with which their thoughts are chiefly converſant, from which they moſt habitually derive complacency, is rather their own qualified merit and ſervices, though confeſſed to be inadequate, than the ſufferings and atoning death of a crucified Saviour. The affections towards our bleſſed Lord therefore (according to the theory of the paſſions formerly laid down) cannot be expected to flouriſh, becauſe they receive not that which was ſhewn to be neceſſary to their nutriment and growth. If we would love him as affectionately, and rejoice in him as triumphantly as the firſt Chriſtians did; we muſt learn like them to repoſe our entire truſt in him, and to adopt the language of the apoſtle, "God forbid "that I ſhould glory, ſave in the croſs of our "Lord

Digitized by Google

"Lord Jesus Christ *"—"Who of God is "made unto us wisdom and righteousness, "and sanctification, and redemption †."

Condemnation of those who abuse the doctrine of free Grace.

DOUBTLESS there have been too many who, to their eternal ruin, have abused the doctrine of Salvation by Grace; and have vainly trusted in Christ for pardon and acceptance, when by their vicious lives they have plainly proved the groundlessness of their pretensions. The tree is to be known by its fruits; and there is too much reason to fear that there is no principle of faith, when it does not decidedly evince itself by the fruits of holiness. Dreadful indeed will be the doom, above that of all others, of those loose professors of Christianity, to whom at the last day our blessed Saviour will address those words, "I never knew you; depart "from me, all ye that work iniquity." But the danger of error on this side ought not to render us insensible to the opposite error; an error against which in these days it seems particularly necessary to guard. It is far from the intention of the writer of this work to enter into the niceties of controversy. But surely without danger of being thought to

* Gal. vi. 14. † 1 Cor. i. 30.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

violate this design, he may be permitted to contend, that they who in the main believe the doctrines of the church of England, are bound to allow that our dependence on our blessed Saviour, as alone the meritorious cause of our acceptance with God, and as the means of all its blessed fruits and glorious consequences, must be not merely formal and nominal, but real and substantial: not vague, qualified, and partial, but direct, cordial, and entire. "Repentance towards God, and faith "towards our Lord Jesus Christ," was the sum of the apostolical instructions. It is not an occasional invocation of the name of Christ, or a transient recognition of his authority, that fills up the measure of the terms, *believing in Jesus*. This we shall find no such easy task; and if we trust that we do believe, we should all perhaps do well to cry out in the words of an imploring suppliant (he supplicated not in vain) "Lord, help thou our "unbelief." We must be deeply conscious of our guilt and misery, heartily repenting of our sins, and firmly resolving to forsake them; and thus penitently "fleeing for refuge to "the hope set before us," we must found altogether on the merit of the crucified Redeemer our hopes of escape from their deserved punishment, and of deliverance from their

Believing in Christ, what it really implies.

Digitized by Google

their enſlaving power. This muſt be our firſt, our laſt, our only plea. We are to ſurrender ourſelves up to him to "be waſhed "in his blood*," to be ſanctified by his Spirit, reſolving to receive him for our Lord and Maſter, to learn in his ſchool, to obey all his commandments. SECT. IV.

Anſwer to the objection, that we inſiſt on metaphyſical niceties.

It may perhaps be not unneceſſary, after having treated ſo largely on this important topic, to add a few words in order to obviate a charge which may be urged againſt us, that we are inſiſting on nice and abſtruſe diſtinctions in what is a matter of general concern; and this too in a ſyſtem, which on its original promulgation was declared to be peculiarly intended for the ſimple and poor. It will be abundantly evident however on a little reflection, and experience fully proves the poſition, that what has been required is not the perception of a ſubtile diſtinction, but a ſtate and condition of heart. To the former, the poor and the ignorant muſt be indeed confeſſed unequal; but they are far leſs indiſpoſed than the great and the learned, to bow down to that "preaching of the croſs which is to "them that periſh fooliſhneſs, but unto them

* Rev. i. 5.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

"that are ſaved, the power of God, and the "wiſdom of God." The poor are not liable to be puffed up by the intoxicating fumes of ambition and worldly grandeur. They are leſs likely to be kept from entering into the ſtrait and narrow way, and when they have entered to be drawn back again or to be retarded in their progreſs, by the cares or the pleaſures of life. They may expreſs themſelves ill; but their views may be ſimple, and their hearts humble, penitent, and ſincere. It is as in other caſes; the vulgar are the ſubjects of phænomena, the learned explain them: the former know nothing of the theory of viſion or of ſentiment; but this ignorance hinders not that they ſee and think, and though unable to diſcourſe elaborately on the paſſions, they can feel warmly for their children, their friends, their country.

The atonement and grace of Chriſt farther preſſed as the ſubject of our habitual regard.

AFTER this digreſſion, if that be indeed a digreſſion which by removing a formidable objection renders the truth of the poſitions we wiſh to eſtabliſh more clear and leſs queſtionable, we may now reſume the thread of our argument. Still intreating therefore the attention of thoſe, who have not been uſed to think much of the neceſſity of this undivided,

Digitized by Google

divided, and, if it may be ſo termed, unadulterated reliance, for which we have been contending; we would ſtill more particularly addreſs ourſelves to others who are diſpoſed to believe that though, in ſome obſcure and vague ſenſe, the death of Chriſt as the ſatisfaction for our ſins, and for the purchaſe of our future happineſs, and the ſanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, are to be admitted as fundamental articles of our creed, yet that theſe are doctrines ſo much above us, that they are not objects ſuited to our capacities; and that, turning our eyes therefore from theſe difficult ſpeculations, we ſhould fix them on the practical and moral precepts of the Goſpel. "Theſe it moſt concerns "us to know; theſe therefore let us ſtudy. "Such is the frailty of our nature, ſuch the "ſtrength and number of our temptations to "evil, that in reducing the Goſpel morality "to practice we ſhall find full employment: "and by attending to theſe moral precepts, "rather than to thoſe high myſterious doc-"trines which you are preſſing on us, we "ſhall beſt prepare to appear before God "on that tremendous day, when "He ſhall "judge every man according to his WORKS."

"Vain wiſdom all, and falſe philoſophy!"

It

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

It will at once deſtroy this flimſy web, to reply in the words of our bleſſed Saviour, and of his beloved Diſciple—"This is the "*work* of God, that ye *believe* in him whom "he hath ſent *." "This is his *command-* "*ment*, that we ſhould *believe* on the name "of his Son Jeſus Chriſt †." In truth, if we conſider but for a moment the opinions of men who argue thus, we muſt be conſcious of their abſurdity. Let the modern Unitarian reduce the Goſpel to a mere ſyſtem of ethics, but ſurely it is in the higheſt degree unreaſonable to admit into our ſcheme all the grand peculiarities of Chriſtianity, and having admitted, to neglect and think no more of them! "Wherefore" (might the Socinian ſay) "Wherefore all this coſtly and "complicated machinery? It is like the Ty- "chonic aſtronomy, encumbered and ſelf- "convicted by its own complicated relations "and uſeleſs perplexities. It is ſo little like "the ſimplicity of nature, it is ſo unworthy "of the divine hand, that it even offends "againſt thoſe rules of propriety which we "require to be obſerved in the imperfect com- "poſitions of the human intellect *(a)*."

* John, vi. 29. † 1 John, iii. 23.

(a) Nec Deus interfit, &c.

Digitized by Google

SECT. IV.

WELL may the Socinian assume this lofty tone, with those whom we are now addressing. If these be indeed the doctrines of Revelation, common sense suggests to us that from their nature and their magnitude, they deserve our most serious regard. It is the very theology of Epicurus to allow the existence of these "heavenly things," but to deny their connection with human concerns, and their influence on human actions. Besides the unreasonableness of this conduct, we might strongly urge also in this connection the prophaneness of thus treating as matters of subordinate consideration those parts of the system of Christianity, which are so strongly impressed on our reverence by the dignity of the person to whom they relate. This very argument is indeed repeatedly and pointedly pressed by the sacred writers *.

NOR is the prophane irreverence of this conduct more striking than its ingratitude. When from reading that our Saviour was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and "the express image of his person, upholding "all things by the word of his power," we go on to consider the purpose for which he

* Vide Heb. ii. 1, &c.

came

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III.

came on earth, and all that he did and ſuffered for us; ſurely if we have a ſpark of ingenuouſneſs left within us we ſhall condemn ourſelves as guilty of the blackeſt ingratitude, in rarely noticing, or coldly turning away, on whatever ſhallow pretences, from the contemplation of theſe miracles of mercy. For thoſe baſer minds however on which fear alone can operate, that motive is ſuperadded: and we are plainly forewarned, both directly and indirectly, by the example of the Jewiſh nation, that God will not hold them guiltleſs who are thus unmindful of his moſt ſignal acts of condeſcenſion and kindneſs. But as this is a queſtion of pure Revelation, reaſonings from probability may not be deemed deciſive. To Revelation therefore we muſt appeal; and without entering into a laboured diſcuſſion of the ſubject, which might be to treſpaſs on the reader's patience, I would refer him to the ſacred Writings themſelves for complete ſatisfaction. We would earneſtly recommend it to him to weigh with the utmoſt ſerioufneſs thoſe paſſages of Scripture wherein the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity are expreſsly mentioned; and farther, to attend with due regard to the illuſtration and confirmation, which the concluſions reſulting from thoſe

Digitized by Google

SECT. IV.

those passages receive incidentally from the word of God. They who maintain the opinion which we are combating, will thereby become convinced that their's is indeed an *unscriptural* Religion; and will learn, instead of turning off their eyes from the grand peculiarities of Christianity, to keep these ever in view, as the pregnant principles whence all the rest must derive their origin, and receive their best support *.

LET

* Any one who wishes to investigate this subject, will do well to study attentively M'LAURIN's Essay on Prejudices against the Gospel.—It may not be amiss here to direct the reader's attention to a few leading arguments, many of them those of the work just recommended. Let him maturely estimate the force of those terms, whereby the Apostle in the following passages designates and characterizes the whole of the Christian system. "We preach Christ crucified"—"We determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus "Christ, and him crucified." The value of this argument will be acknowledged by all who consider, that a system is never designated by an immaterial or an inferior part of it, but by that which constitutes its prime consideration and essential distinction. The conclusion suggested by this remark is confirmed by the Lord's Supper being the rite by which our Saviour himself commanded his Disciples to keep him in remembrance; and indeed a similar lesson is taught by the Sacrament of Baptism, which shadows out our souls being washed and purified by the blood of Christ. Observe next the frequency with which our Saviour's death and sufferings are introduced, and how often they are urged as practical motives.

"The

Digitized by Google

CHAP. III. Conclusion.

Let us then each for himself solemnly ask ourselves, whether *we* have fled for refuge to the appointed hope? And whether we are habitually

---

"The minds of the Apostles seem full of this subject. "Every thing put them in mind of it; they did not allow "themselves to have it long out of their view, nor did any "other branch of spiritual instruction make them lose sight of "it." Consider next that part of the Epistle to the Romans, wherein St. Paul speaks of some who went about to establish their own righteousness, and had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. May not this charge be in some degree urged, and even more strongly than in the case of the Jews, against those who satisfy themselves with vague, general, occasional thoughts of our Saviour's mediation; and the source of whose habitual complacency, as we explained above, is rather their being tolerably well satisfied with their own characters and conduct? Yet St. Paul declares concerning those of whom he speaks, as concerning persons whose sad situation could not be too much lamented, that he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, adding still more emphatical expressions of deep and bitter regret.

Let the Epistle to the Galatians be also carefully examined and considered; and let it be fairly asked, what was the particular in which the Judaizing Christians were defective, and the want of which is spoken of in such strong terms as these; that it frustrates the grace of God, and must debar from all the benefits of the death of Jesus? The Judaizing converts were not immoral. They seem to have admitted the chief tenets concerning our Saviour. But they appear to have been disposed to trust *(not wholly, be it observed also, but only in part)* for their acceptance with God, to the Mosaic institutions, instead of reposing entirely on

Digitized by Google

habitually looking to it, as to the only ſource of conſolation? "Other foundation can no "man lay:" there is no other ground of dependence, no other plea for pardon; but *here* there *is* hope, even to the uttermoſt. Let us labour then to affect our hearts with a deep conviction of our need of a Redeemer, and of the value of his offered mediation. Let us fall down humbly before the throne of God, imploring pity and pardon in the name of the Son of his love. Let us beſeech him to give us a true ſpirit of repentance,

SECT. IV.

---

on the merits of Chriſt. Here let it be remembered, that when a compliance with theſe inſtitutions was not regarded as conveying this inference, the Apoſtle ſhewed by his own conduct, that he did not deem it criminal; whence, no leſs than from the words of the Epiſtle, it is clear that the offence of the Judaizing Chriſtians whom he condemned, was what we have ſtated; that their crime did not conſiſt in their obſtinately continuing to adhere to a diſpenſation the ceremonial of which Chriſtianity had abrogated, nor yet that it aroſe out of the ſacrifices of the Levitical law being from their very nature without efficacy for the blotting out of ſin—Vide Hebrews x. 4. &c.—It was not that the foundation on which they built was of a ſandy nature, but that they built on *any other* foundation than that which God had laid in the Goſpel; it was not that they placed their confidence, either in part or in the whole on a falſe or a defective object, but that they did not direct it excluſively to the only true object of Hope held forth to us by the Goſpel.

and

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

On the prevailing inadequate Conceptions concerning the Nature and the Strictneſs of PRACTICAL *Chriſtianity.*

SECT. I.

CHAP. IV.

ONE part of the foregoing title may perhaps on the firſt view excite ſome ſurpriſe in ſuch of my readers as may have drawn a haſty inference from the charges conveyed by the two preceding chapters. It might perhaps be expected, that they who have very low conceptions of the corruption of human nature, would be proportionably leſs indulgent to human frailty; and that they who lay little ſtreſs on Chriſt's ſatisfaction for ſin, or on the operations of the Holy Spirit, would be more high and rigid in their demands of diligent endeavours after univerſal holineſs; ſince their ſcheme implies that we muſt depend chiefly on our own exértions and performances for our acceptance with God.

BUT

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

But any such expectations as these would be greatly disappointed. There is in fact a region of truth, and a region of errors. They who hold the fundamental doctrines of Scripture in their due force, hold also in its due degree of purity the practical system which Scripture inculcates. But they who explain away the former, soften down the latter also, and reduce it to the level of their own defective scheme. It is not from any confidence in the superior amount of their own performances, or in the greater vigour of their own exertions, that they reconcile themselves to their low views of the satisfaction of Christ, and of the influence of the Spirit; but it should rather seem to be their plan so to depress the required standard of practice, that no man need fall short of it, and that no superior aid can be wanted for enabling us to attain to it. It happens however with respect to their simple method of morality, as in the case of the short ways to knowledge, of which some vain pretenders have vaunted themselves to be possessed; despising the beaten track in which more sober and humble spirits have been content to tread, they have indignantly struck into new and untried paths; but these have failed

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

of conducting them to the right object, and have issued only in ignorance and conceit.

It seems in our days to be the commonly received opinion, that provided a man admit in general terms the truth of Christianity, though he neither know nor consider much concerning the particulars of the system; and if he be not habitually guilty of any of the grosser vices against his fellow-creatures, we have no great reason to be dissatisfied with him, or to question the validity of his claim to the name and privileges of a Christian. The title implies no more than a sort of formal, general assent to Christianity in the gross, and a degree of morality in practice, little if at all superior to that for which we look in a good Deist, Mussulman, or Hindoo.

Should any one be disposed to deny that this is a fair representation of the religion of the bulk of the Christian world, he might be asked, whether if it were proved to them beyond dispute that Christianity is a mere forgery, would this occasion any great change in their conduct or habits of mind? Would any alteration be made in consequence of this discovery, except in a few of their speculative

Digitized by Google

culative opinions, which, when distinct from practice, it is a part of their own system, to think of little consequence; and with regard to public worship, (knowing the good effects of religion upon the lower orders of the people) they might still think it better to attend occasionally for example's sake? Would not a regard for their character, their health, their domestic and social comforts, still continue to restrain them from vicious excesses, and prompt them to persist in the discharge, according to their present measure, of the various duties of their stations? Would they find themselves dispossessed of what had been to them hitherto the repository of counsel and instruction, the rule of their conduct, their habitual source of peace, and hope, and consolation?

It were needless to put these questions. They are answered in fact already by the lives of many known unbelievers, between whom and these professed Christians, even the familiar associates of both, though men of discernment and observation, would discover little difference either in conduct or temper of mind. How little then does Christianity deserve that title to novelty and superiority which has been almost uni-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

verſally admitted; that pre-eminence, as a practical code, over all other ſyſtems of ethics! How unmerited are the praiſes which have been laviſhed upon it by its friends; praiſes, in which even its enemies (not in general diſpoſed to make conceſſions in its favour) have ſo often been unwarily drawn in to acquieſce!

WAS it then for this, that the Son of God condeſcended to become our inſtructor and our pattern, leaving us an example that we might tread in his ſteps? Was it for this that the apoſtles of Chriſt voluntarily ſubmitted to hunger and nakedneſs and pain, and ignominy and death, when forewarned too by their Maſter that ſuch would be their treatment? That, after all, their diſciples ſhould attain to no higher a ſtrain of virtue than thoſe who rejecting their Divine authority, ſhould ſtill adhere to the old philoſophy?

BUT it may perhaps be objected that we are forgetting an obſervation which we ourſelves have made, that Chriſtianity has raiſed the general ſtandard of morals; to which therefore Infidelity herſelf now finds it prudent to conform, availing herſelf of the pure morality of Chriſtianity, and ſometimes wiſhing

Digitized by Google

ing to uſurp to herſelf the credit of it, while ſhe ſtigmatizes the authors with the epithets of ignorant dupes or deſigning impoſtors! SECT. I.

BUT let it be aſked, are the motives of Chriſtianity ſo little neceſſary to the practice of it, its principles to its concluſions, that the one may be ſpared and yet the other remain in undiminiſhed force? Still then, its *Doctrines* are no more than a barren and inapplicable or at leaſt an unneceſſary theory, the place of which, it may perhaps be added, would be well ſupplied by a more ſimple and leſs coſtly ſcheme.

BUT can it be? Is Chriſtianity then reduced to a mere creed? Is its practical influence bounded within a few external plauſibilities? Does its eſſence conſiſt only in a few ſpeculative opinions, and a few uſeleſs and unprofitable tenets? And can this be the ground of that portentous diſtinction, which is ſo unequivocally made by the Evangeliſt between thoſe who accept, and thoſe who reject the Goſpel: "He that "believeth on the Son, hath everlaſting "life: and he that believeth not the Son, "ſhall not ſee life: but the wrath of God

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"abideth on him?" This were to run into the very error which the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians would be moſt forward to condemn, of making an unproductive faith the rule of God's future judgement, and the ground of an eternal ſeparation. Thus not unlike the rival circumnavigators from Spain and Portugal, who ſetting out in contrary directions, found themſelves in company at the very time they thought themſelves farthest from each other; ſo the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians arrive, though by a different courſe, almoſt at the very ſame point, and occupy nearly the ſame ſtation as a ſet of enthuſiaſts, who alſo reſt upon a barren faith, to whom on the firſt view they might be thought the moſt nearly oppoſite, and whoſe tenets they with reaſon profeſs to hold in peculiar deteſtation. By what pernicious courteſy of language is it, that this wretched ſyſtem has been flattered with the name of Chriſtianity?

Strictneſs of true practical Chriſtianity:

THE morality of the Goſpel is not ſo ſlight a fabric. Chriſtianity throughout the whole extent exhibits proofs of its Divine original, and its practical precepts are no leſs pure than its doctrines are ſublime. Can the compaſs of language furniſh injunctions ſtricter

Digitized by Google

ter in their measure or larger in their comprehension, than those with which the word of God abounds; "*Whatsoever* ye do in *word* "or *deed*, do *all* in the name of the Lord Je-"sus;"—"Be *ye* holy, *for God is holy:*"—"Be ye *perfect* as your Father which is in "Heaven is *perfect?*" We are commanded to *perfect* holiness, to go on unto *perfection.*

SUCH are the Scripture admonitions; and surely they to whom such admonitions are addressed, may not safely acquiesce in low attainments: a conclusion to which we are led as well by the force of the expressions by which Christians are characterized in Scripture, as by the radical change, which is represented as taking place in every man on his becoming a real Christian. "Every one," it is said, "that hath this hope, purifieth "himself even as God is pure:" true Christians are said to be "partakers of the Di-"vine nature;"—"to be created anew in "the image of God;"—"to be temples of "the Holy Ghost." The effects of which must appear "in *all* goodness and righteous-"ness and truth."

GREAT

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

GREAT as was the progreſs which the apoſtle Paul had made in all virtue, he declares of himſelf that *he* ſtill preſſes forward, "forgetting the things which are behind, "and reaching forth unto the things which "are before." He prays for his beloved converts, "that they may be *filled* with *all* the "fulneſs of God;" that they may be *filled* "with the fruits of righteouſneſs:" "that "they might walk worthy of the Lord unto "*all* pleaſing, being fruitful in *every* good "work." And from one of the petitions, which our bleſſed Saviour inſerts in that form of prayer which he has given as a model for our imitation, we may infer that the habitual ſentiment of our hearts ought to be, "Thy will be done in Earth *as it is* "*in Heaven.*"

THESE few extracts from the word of God will ſerve abundantly to evince the *ſtrictneſs* of the Chriſtian morality: but this point will be ſtill more fully eſtabliſhed, when we proceed to inveſtigate the ruling *principles* of the Chriſtian character.

And its eſſential nature opened and ſtated.

I APPREHEND the eſſential practical characteriſtic of true Chriſtians to be this; that relying

Digitized by Google

relying on the promiſes to repenting ſinners of acceptance through the Redeemer, they have renounced and abjured all other maſters, and have cordially and unreſervedly devoted themſelves to God. This is indeed the very figure which baptiſm daily repreſents to us: like the father of Hannibal, we there bring our infant to the altar; we conſecrate him to the ſervice of *his proper owner*, and vow *in his name* eternal hoſtilities againſt all the enemies of his ſalvation. After the ſame manner Chriſtians are become the ſworn enemies of ſin; they will henceforth hold no parley with it, they will allow it in no ſhape, they will admit it to no compoſition; the war which they have denounced againſt it, is cordial, univerſal, irreconcilable.

But this is not all—It is now their determined purpoſe to yield themſelves without reſerve to the reaſonable ſervice of their rightful ſovereign. "They are not their "own:"—their bodily and mental faculties, their natural and acquired endowments, their ſubſtance, their authority, their time, their influence; all theſe, they conſider as belonging to them, not for their own gratification, but as ſo many inſtruments to be conſecrated

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

to the honour of God and employed in his ſervice. This is the maſter principle to which every other muſt be ſubordinate. Whatever may have been hitherto their ruling paſſion; whatever hitherto their leading purſuit; whether ſenſual, or intellectual, of ſcience, of taſte, of fancy, or of feeling, it muſt now poſſeſs but a ſecondary place; or rather (to ſpeak more correctly) it muſt exiſt only at the pleaſure of its true and legitimate ſuperior, and be put altogether under its direction and controul.

THUS it is the prerogative of Chriſtianity "to bring into captivity *every thought* to the "obedience of Chriſt." They who really feel its power, are reſolved "to live no longer "to themſelves, but to him that died for "them:" they know indeed their own infirmities; they know, that the way on which they have entered is ſtrait and difficult, but they know too the encouraging aſſurance, "They who wait on the Lord ſhall renew "their ſtrength," and relying on this animating declaration, they deliberately purpoſe that, ſo far as they may be able, the grand governing maxim of their future lives ſhall be, "*to do all to the glory of God.*"

BEHOLD

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

BEHOLD here the ſeminal principle, which contains within it, as in an embryo ſtate, the rudiments of all true virtue; which, ſtriking deep its roots, though feeble perhaps and lowly in its beginnings, yet ſilently progreſſive, and almoſt inſenſibly maturing, will ſhortly, even in the bleak and churliſh temperature of this world, lift up its head and ſpread abroad its branches, bearing abundant fruits; precious fruits of refreſhment and conſolation, of which the boaſted products of philoſophy are but ſickly imitations, void of fragrance and of flavour. But,

Igneus eſt ollis vigor & cœleſtis origo.

At length it ſhall be tranſplanted into its native region, and enjoy a more genial climate, and a kindlier ſoil; and, burſting forth into full luxuriance, with unfading beauty and unexhauſted odours, ſhall flouriſh for ever in the paradiſe of God.

BUT while the ſervants of Chriſt continue in this life, glorious as is the iſſue of their labours, they receive but too many humiliating memorials of their remaining imperfections, and they daily find reaſon to confeſs, that they cannot do the things that they would. Their *determination*, however, is ſtill unſhaken,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

unshaken, and it is the fixed desire of their hearts to improve in *all holiness*—and this, let it be observed, on many accounts. Various passions concur to push them forward; they are urged on by the dread of failure, in this arduous but necessary work; they trust not, where their all is at stake, to lively emotions, or to internal impressions however warm; the example of Christ is their pattern, the word of God is their rule: there they read, that "without holiness no man "shall see the Lord." It is the description of real Christians, that "they are gradually "changed into the image of their Divine "Master;" and they dare not allow themselves to believe their title sure, except so far as they can discern in themselves the growing traces of this blessed resemblance.

It is not merely however by the fear of misery, and the desire of happiness, that they are actuated in their endeavours to excel in all holiness; they love it for its own sake: nor is it *solely* by the sense of self-interest (a principle it must be confessed of an inferior order, though often unreasonably condemned) that they are influenced in their determination to obey the will of God, and to cultivate his favour. This determination has its foundations

Digitized by Google

foundations indeed in a deep and humiliating ſenſe of his exalted Majeſty and infinite power, and of their own extreme inferiority and littleneſs, attended with a ſettled conviction of its being their duty as his creatures, to ſubmit in all things to the will of their great Creator. But theſe aweful impreſſions are relieved and ennobled by an admiring ſenſe of the infinite perfections and infinite amiableneſs of the Divine Character; animated by a confiding though humble hope of his fatherly kindneſs and protection; and quickened by the grateful recollection of immenſe and continually increaſing obligations. This is the Chriſtian love of God! A love compounded of admiration, of preference, of hope, of truſt, of joy; chaſtiſed by reverential awe, and wakeful with continual gratitude. SECT. I.

I WOULD here expreſs myſelf with caution, leſt I ſhould inadvertently wound the heart of ſome weak but ſincere believer. The elementary principles which have been above enumerated, may exiſt in various degrees and proportions. A difference in natural diſpoſition, in the circumſtances of the paſt life, and in numberleſs other particulars, may

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

may occaſion a great difference in the predominant tempers, of different Chriſtians. In one the love, in another the fear of God may have the aſcendency; truſt in one, and in another gratitude; but in greater or leſs degrees, a cordial complacency in the ſovereignty of the Divine Being, an exalted ſenſe of his perfections, a grateful impreſſion of his goodneſs, and a humble hope of his favour, are common to them all.—Common—the determination to devote themſelves without exceptions, to the ſervice and glory of God.—Common—the deſire of holineſs and of continual progreſs towards perfection.—Common—an abaſing conſciouſneſs of their own unworthineſs, and of their many remaining infirmities, which interpoſe ſo often to corrupt the ſimplicity of their intentions, to thwart the execution of their purer purpoſes, and fruſtrate the reſolutions of their better hours.

But ſome perhaps, who will not directly oppoſe the concluſions for which we have been contending, may endeavour to elude them. It may be urged, that to repreſent them as of general application, is going much too far; and however true in the caſe

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

caſe of ſome individuals of a higher order, it may be aſſerted they are not applicable to ordinary Chriſtians; from theſe ſo much will not ſurely be expected; and here perhaps there may be a ſecret reference to that ſuppoſed mitigation of the requiſitions of the divine Law under the Chriſtian diſpenſation, which we have already noticed as being too prevalent among profeſſing Chriſtians. This is ſo important a point that it ought not to be paſſed over: let us call in the authority of Scripture; where the difficulty is not to find proofs, but to ſelect with diſcretion from the multitude which pour in upon us. Here alſo, as in former inſtances, the poſitive injunctions of Scripture are confirmed and illuſtrated by various conſiderations and inferences, ſuggeſted by other parts of the ſacred Writings, all tending to the ſame infallible concluſion.

Precepts in broad terms.

In the firſt place, the precepts are expreſſed in the moſt general terms; there is no hint given, that any perſons are at liberty to conceive themſelves exempted from the obligation of them; and in any who are diſpoſed to urge ſuch a plea of exemption, it may well excite the moſt ſerious apprehenſion to conſider how the plea would be received by an

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

earthly tribunal: no weak argument this to ſuch as are acquainted with the Scriptures, and who know how often God is there repreſented as reaſoning with mankind on the principles, which they have eſtabliſhed for their dealings with each other.

The Precepts *univerſal*, becauſe reſulting from relations common to all Chriſtians.

BUT in the next place the precepts of the Goſpel contain within themſelves abundant proofs of their *univerſal* application, inaſmuch as they are grounded on circumſtances and relations common to *all* Chriſtians, and of the benefits of which, even our Objectors themſelves (though they would evade the practical deductions from them) would not be willing to relinquiſh their ſhare. Chriſtians "are not their own," becauſe "*they are bought with a price*;" they are not "to live unto themſelves, but *to him* "*that died for them*;" they are commanded to do the moſt difficult duties, "that they "may be the children of their Father which "is in heaven;" and "except a man *be* "*born again of the Spirit*" (thus again becoming one of the ſons of God) "*he cannot* "*enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" It is "*becauſe they are ſons*," that God has given them what in Scripture language is ſtyled *the ſpirit of adoption*. It is only of "as many "*as*

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

"*as are led by the Spirit of God*," that it is declared that "they are the ſons of God;" and we are expreſsly warned (in order as it were to prevent any ſuch looſe profeſſion of Chriſtianity as that which we are here combating) "*If any man* have not the Spirit of "Chriſt, *he is none of his*." In ſhort, Chriſtians in general are every where denominated *the ſervants and the children* of God, and are required to ſerve him with that ſubmiſſive obedience, and that affectionate promptitude of duty, which belong to thoſe endearing relations.

Strong practical Precepts, and other confirmations.

ESTIMATE next, the force of that well known paſſage—"Thou ſhalt love the Lord "thy God with *all* thy heart, and with *all* "thy mind, and with *all* thy ſoul, and with "*all* thy ſtrength!" The injunction is multiplied on us, as it were, to ſilence the ſophiſtry of the caviller, and to fix the moſt inconſiderate mind. And though, for the ſake of argument, we ſhould concede for the preſent, that, under *the qualifications formerly ſuggeſted*, an *ardent* and *vigorous* affection were not indiſpenſably required of us; yet ſurely if the words have any meaning at all, the leaſt which can be intended by them is that ſettled predominant eſteem and cordial

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

preference for which we are now contending. The concluſion which this paſſage forces on us, is ſtrikingly confirmed by other parts of Scripture, wherein the love of God is poſitively commended to the *whole* of a Chriſtian church *; or wherein the want of it †, or wherein its not being the chief and ruling affection, is charged on perſons profeſſing themſelves Chriſtians, as being ſufficient to diſprove their claim to that appellation, or as being equivalent to denying it ‡. Let not therefore any deceive themſelves by imagining, that only an abſolute unqualified renunciation of the deſire of the favour of God is *here* condemned. God will not accept of a *divided* affection; a *ſingle* heart, and a *ſingle* eye are in expreſs terms declared to be indiſpenſably required of us. We are ordered, under the figure of amaſſing heavenly treaſure, to make the favour and ſervice of God our *chief* purſuit, for this very reaſon, becauſe "*where our treaſure is, there* "*will our hearts be alſo.*" It is on this principle that in ſpeaking of particular vices, ſuch phraſes are often uſed in Scripture, as ſuggeſt

* 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

† 1 John, iii. 17.—Rom. xvi. 18.—Compared with Philip. iii. 19.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 4.

that

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

that their criminality mainly conſiſts in drawing away the HEART from Him who is the juſt object of its preference; and that ſins, which we might think very different in criminality, are claſſed together, becauſe they all agree in this grand character. Nor is this preference aſſerted only over affections which are vicious in themſelves, and to which therefore Chriſtianity might well be ſuppoſed hoſtile; but over thoſe alſo which in their juſt meaſure are not only lawful, but even moſt ſtrongly enjoined on us. "He "that loveth father and mother more than "me," ſays our bleſſed Saviour, "is not "worthy of me;" "and he that loveth ſon "or daughter more than me, is not worthy "of me *." The ſpirit of theſe injunctions harmonizes with many commendations in Scripture of zeal for the honour of God; as well as with that ſtrong expreſſion of diſguſt and abhorrence with which the lukewarm, thoſe that are neither cold nor hot, are ſpoken of as being more loathſome and offenſive than even open and avowed enemies.

ANOTHER claſs of inſtances tending to the ſame point is furniſhed by thoſe many paſ-

* Matt. x. 37.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ſages of Scripture, wherein the promoting of *the glory* of God is commanded as our ſupreme and univerſal aim, and wherein the honour due unto *Him* is declared to be that in which he will allow no competitor to participate. On this head indeed the Holy Scriptures are, if poſſible, more peremptory than on the former; and at the ſame time ſo full as to render particular citations unneceſſary to thoſe who have ever ſo little acquaintance with the word of God.

To put the ſame thing therefore in another light. All who have read the Scriptures muſt confeſs that idolatry is the crime againſt which God's higheſt reſentment is expreſſed, and his ſevereſt puniſhment denounced. But let us not deceive ourſelves. It is not in bowing the knee to idols that idolatry conſiſts, ſo much as in the internal homage of the heart; as in feeling towards them any of that ſupreme love, or reverence, or gratitude, which God reſerves to himſelf as his own excluſive prerogative. On the ſame principle, whatever elſe draws off the heart from him, engroſſes our prime regard, and holds the chief place in our eſteem and affections, *that*, in the eſtimation of reaſon, is no leſs an idol to us, than an image

Digitized by Google

of wood or ſtone would be; before which we ſhould fall down and worſhip. Think not this a ſtrained analogy; it is the very language and argument of inſpiration. The ſervant of God is commanded not to ſet up his idol in his *Heart*; and ſenſuality and covetouſneſs are repeatedly termed *Idolatry*. The ſame God who declares—"My glory "will I not give to another, neither my "praiſe *to graven images*," declares alſo—"Let not the wiſe man glory in his wiſdom, "neither let the mighty man *glory* in his "might; let not the rich man *glory* in his "riches *." "No fleſh may *glory* in his "preſence;" "he that *glorieth*, let him glory "in the Lord." The ſudden vengeance by which the vain-glorious oſtentation of Herod was puniſhed, when, acquieſcing in the ſervile adulation of an admiring multitude, "he "gave not God the *glory*," is a dreadful comment on theſe injunctions.

Extreme importance of the abovementioned conſiderations.

THESE aweful declarations, it is to be feared, are little regarded. Let the Great, and the Wiſe, and the Learned, and the Succeſsful, lay them ſeriouſly to heart, and labour habitually to conſider their ſuperiority, whe-

* Jerem. ix. 23.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ther derived from nature, or ſtudy, or fortune, as the unmerited bounty of God. This reflection will naturally tend to produce a diſpoſition, in all reſpects the oppoſite to that proud ſelf-complacency ſo apt to grow upon the human heart: a diſpoſition honourable to God, and uſeful to man, a temper compoſed of reverence, humility, and gratitude, and delighting to be engaged in the praiſes, and employed in the benevolent ſervice of the univerſal Benefactor.

BUT, to return to our ſubject, it only remains to be remarked, that here as in the former inſtances, the characters of the righteous and of the wicked, as delineated in Scripture, exactly correſpond with the repreſentations which have been given of the Scripture injunctions.

THE neceſſity of this cordial unreſerved devotedneſs to the glory and ſervice of God, as being indiſpenſable to the character of the true Chriſtian, has been inſiſted on at the greater length, not only on account of its own extreme importance, but alſo becauſe it appears to be a duty too generally overlooked. Once well eſtabliſhed, it will ſerve as a fundamental principle both for the government

Digitized by Google

ment of the heart and regulation of the conduct; and will prove eminently useful in the decision of many practical cases, which it might be difficult to bring under the undisputed operation of any subordinate or appropriate rule.

SECT. I.

SECT. II.

AND now, having endeavoured to establish the strictness, and to ascertain the essential character of true practical Christianity, let us investigate a little more in detail the practical system of the bulk of professed Christians among ourselves *.

General notion of practical Christianity amongst the bulk of nominal Christians, stated and illustrated.

IT was formerly remarked, that the whole subject of Religion was often viewed from such a distance as to be seen only in the gross. We now, it is to be feared, shall find too much cause for believing that they who approach a little nearer, and do discover in

* It will be remembered by the reader, that it is not the object of this work to animadvert on the vices, defects, and erroneous opinions of the times, except so far as they are received into the prevailing religious system, or are tolerated by it, and are not thought sufficient to prevent a man from being esteemed on the whole a very tolerable Christian.

Christianity

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

Chriſtianity ſomewhat of a diſtinct form, yet come not cloſe enough to diſcern her peculiar lineaments and conformation. The writer muſt not be underſtood to mean that the ſeveral miſconceptions, which he ſhall have occaſion to point out, will be generally found to exiſt with any thing like preciſion, much leſs that they are regularly digeſted into a ſyſtem; nor will it be expected they all ſhould meet in the ſame perſon, nor that they will not be found in different people, and under different circumſtances, variouſly blended, combined, and modified. It will be enough if we ſucceed in tracing out great and general outlines. The human countenance may be well deſcribed by its general characters, though infinitely varied by the peculiarities which belong to different individuals, and often by ſuch ſhades and minuteneſſes of difference, as though abundantly obvious to our perceptions, yet would exceed the power of definition to diſcriminate, or even of language to expreſs.

A VERY erroneous notion appears to prevail concerning the true nature of Religion. Religion, agreeably to what has been already ſtated, (the importance of the ſubject will excuſe repetition) may be conſidered as the implantation

Digitized by Google

implantation of a vigorous and active principle; it is seated in the heart, where its authority is recognized as supreme, whence by degrees it expels whatever is opposed to it, and where it gradually brings all the affections and desires under its complete controul and regulation. SECT. II.

But though the heart be its special residence, it may be said to possess in a degree the ubiquity of its Divine Author. Every endeavour and pursuit must acknowledge its presence; and whatever receives not its sacred stamp, is to be condemned as inherently defective, and is to be at once relinquished. It is like the principle of vitality, which, animating every part, lives throughout the whole of the human body, and communicates its kindly influence to the smallest and remotest fibres of the frame. But the notion of Religion entertained by many among us seems altogether different. They begin indeed, in submission to her clear prohibitions, by fencing off from the field of human action, a certain district, which, though it in many parts bear fruits on which they cast a longing eye, they cannot but confess to be forbidden ground. They next assign to Religion a portion, larger or smaller according to whatever

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ever may be their circumſtances and views, in which however ſhe is to poſſeſs merely a qualified juriſdiction, and having ſo done, they conceive that without let or hindrance they have a right to range at will over the ſpacious remainder. Religion can claim only a ſtated proportion of their thoughts, their time, their fortune, and influence; and of theſe, or perhaps of any of them, if they make her any thing of a liberal allowance, ſhe may well be ſatisfied: the reſt is now their own to do what they will with; they have paid their tythes, ſay rather their compoſition, the demands of the Church are ſatisfied, and they may ſurely be permitted to enjoy what ſhe has left without moleſtation or interference.

General conſequences of the above-mentioned error.

It is ſcarcely poſſible to ſtate too ſtrongly the miſchief which reſults from this fundamental error. At the ſame time its conſequences are ſo natural and obvious, that one would think it ſcarcely poſſible not to foreſee that they muſt infallibly follow. The greateſt part of human actions is conſidered as indifferent. If men are not chargeable with actual vices, and are decent in the diſcharge of their religious duties; if they do not ſtray into the forbidden ground, if they reſpect the rights

Digitized by Google

rights of the conceded allotment, what more can be expected from them? Inſtead of keeping at a diſtance from *all ſin*, in which alone conſiſts our ſafety, they will be apt not to care how near they approach what they conceive to be the boundary line; if they have not actually paſſed it, there is no harm done, it is no treſpaſs. Thus the free and active ſpirit of Religion is "cribbed and hemmed "in;" ſhe is checked in her diſpoſition to expand her territory, and enlarge the circle of her influence. She muſt keep to her preſcribed confines, and every attempt to extend them will be reſiſted as an encroachment.

BUT this is not all. Since whatever can be gained from her allotment, or whatever can be taken in from the forbidden ground, will be ſo much of addition to that land of liberty, where men may roam at large, free from reſtraint or moleſtation, they will of courſe be conſtantly, and almoſt inſenſibly, ſtraitening and preſſing upon the limits of the religious allotment on the one hand; and on the other, will be removing back a little farther and farther the fence which abridges them on the ſide of the forbidden ground. If Religion attempt for a time to defend her frontier, ſhe by degrees gives way. The ſpace

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ſpace ſhe occupies diminiſhes till it be ſcarcely diſcernible; whilſt, her ſpirit extinguiſhed, and her force deſtroyed, ſhe is little more than the nominal poſſeſſor even of the contracted limits to which ſhe has been avowedly reduced.

The preceding ſtatement confirmed by an appeal to various claſſes of nominal Chriſtians.

THIS it is to be feared is but too faithful a repreſentation of the general ſtate of things among ourſelves. The promotion of the glory of God, and the poſſeſſion of his favour, are no longer recognized as the objects of our higheſt regard, and moſt ſtrenuous endeavours; as furniſhing to us, a vigorous, habitual, and univerſal principle of action. We ſet up for ourſelves: we are become our own maſters. The ſenſe of conſtant homage and continual ſervice is irkſome and galling to us; and we rejoice in being emancipated from it, as from a ſtate of baſe and ſervile villainage. Thus the very tenure and condition, by which life and all its poſſeſſions are held, undergo a total change: our faculties and powers are now our own: whatever we have is regarded rather as a property than as a truſt; or if there ſtill exiſt the remembrance of ſome paramount claim, we are ſatisfied with an occaſional acknowledgment of a nominal right; we pay our

Digitized by Google

our pepper corn, and take our eſtates to ourſelves in full and free enjoyment. SECT. II.

HENCE it is that ſo little ſenſe of reſponſibility ſeems attached to the poſſeſſion of high rank, or ſplendid abilities, or affluent fortunes, or other means or inſtruments of uſefulneſs. The inſtructive admonitions, "give "an account of thy ſtewardſhip,"—"occupy "till I come;" are forgotten. Or if it be acknowledged by ſome men of larger views than ordinary, that a reference is to be had to ſome principle ſuperior to that of our own gratification, it is, at beſt, to the good of ſociety, or to the welfare of our families: and even then the obligations reſulting from theſe relations, are ſeldom enforced on us by any higher ſanctions than thoſe of family comfort, and of worldly intereſt or eſtimation. Beſides; what multitudes of perſons are there, people without families, in private ſtations, or of a retired turn, to whom they are ſcarcely held to apply! and what multitudes of caſes to which it would be thought unneceſſary ſcrupuloſity to extend them! Accordingly we find *in fact*, that the generality of mankind among the higher order, in the formation of their ſchemes, in the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

the ſelection of their ſtudies, in the choice of their place of reſidence, in the employment and diſtribution of their time, in their thoughts, converſation, and amuſements, are conſidered as being at liberty, if there be no actual vice, to conſult in the main their own gratification.

THUS the generous and wakeful ſpirit of Chriſtian Benevolence, ſeeking and finding every where occaſions for its exerciſe, is exploded, and a ſyſtem of *decent ſelfiſhneſs* is avowedly eſtabliſhed in its ſtead; a ſyſtem ſcarcely more to be abjured for its impiety, than to be abhorred for its cold inſenſibility to the opportunities of diffuſing happineſs.

The Idle and Diſſipated.

"Have we no families, or are they provided "for? Are we wealthy, and bred to no pro- "feſſion? Are we young and lively, and in "the gaiety and vigour of youth? Surely we "may be allowed to take our pleaſure. We "neglect no duty, we live in no vice, we "do nobody any harm, and have a right "to amuſe ourſelves. We have nothing "better to do, we wiſh we had; our time "hangs heavy on our hands for want of "it."

I PITY

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

I PITY the man who can travel from Dan to Beer-ſheba, and cry "It is all barren." No man has a right to be idle—Not to ſpeak of that great work which we all have to accompliſh, and ſurely the *whole* attention of a ſhort and precarious life is not more than an eternal intereſt may well require; where is it that in ſuch a world as this, health and leiſure and affluence may not find ſome ignorance to inſtruct, ſome wrong to redreſs, ſome want to ſupply, ſome miſery to alleviate? Shall Ambition and Avarice never ſleep? Shall they never want objects on which to faſten? Shall they be ſo obſervant to diſcover, ſo acute to diſcern, ſo eager, ſo patient to purſue, and ſhall the Benevolence of Chriſtians want employment?

YET thus life rolls away with too many of us in a courſe of "ſhapeleſs idleneſs." Its recreations conſtitute its chief buſineſs. Watering places—the ſports of the field—cards! never failing cards!—the aſſembly—the theatre—all contribute their aid—amuſements are multiplied, and combined, and varied, "to fill up the void of a liſtleſs and languid "life;" and by the judicious uſe of theſe different reſources, there is often a kind of ſober ſettled plan of domeſtic diſſipation, in

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

which with all imaginable decency year after year wears away in unprofitable vacancy. Even old age often finds us pacing in the ſame round of amuſements, which our early youth had tracked out. Meanwhile, being conſcious that we are not giving into any flagrant vice, perhaps that we are guilty of no irregularity, and, it may be, that we are not neglecting the offices of Religion, we perſuade ourſelves that we need not be uneaſy. In the main we do not fall below the general ſtandard of morals, of the claſs and ſtation to which we belong, we may therefore allow ourſelves to glide down the ſtream without apprehenſion of the conſequences.

In the Votaries of ſenſual pleaſures.

SOME, of a character often hardly to be diſtinguiſhed from the claſs we have been juſt deſcribing, take up with *ſenſual* pleaſures. The chief happineſs of their lives conſiſts in one ſpecies or another of animal gratification; and theſe perſons perhaps will be found to compoſe a pretty large deſcription. It will be remembered, that it belongs not to our purpoſe to ſpeak of the groſsly and ſcandalouſly profligate, who renounce all pretenſions to the name of Chriſtians: but of thoſe who, maintaining a certain decency of character, and perhaps being tolerably obſervant

Digitized by Google

vant of the forms of Religion, may yet be not improperly termed *ſober ſenſualiſts*. Theſe, though leſs impetuous and more meaſured, are not leſs ſtaunch and ſteady, than the profeſſed votaries of licentious pleaſure, in the purſuit of their favourite objects. "Mortify the fleſh, with its affections and luſts," is the Chriſtian *precept*; a ſoft luxurious courſe of habitual indulgence, is the *practice* of the bulk of modern Chriſtians: and that conſtant moderation, that wholeſome diſcipline of reſtraint and ſelf-denial, which are requiſite to prevent the unperceived encroachments of the inferior appetites, ſeem altogether diſuſed, as the exploded auſterities of monkiſh ſuperſtition. SECT. II.

CHRISTIANITY calls her profeſſors, to a ſtate of diligent watchfulneſs and active ſervices. But the perſons of whom we are now ſpeaking, forgetting alike the duties they owe to themſelves and to their fellow-creatures, often act as though their condition were meant to be a ſtate of uniform indulgence, and vacant, unprofitable ſloth. To multiply the comforts of affluence, to provide for the gratification of appetite, to be luxurious without diſeaſes, and indolent without laſſitude, ſeems the chief ſtudy of their

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

lives. Nor can they be clearly exempted from this claſs, who, by a common error, ſubſtituting the means for the end, make the preſervation of health and ſpirits, not as inſtruments of uſefulneſs, but as ſources of pleaſure, their great buſineſs and continual care.

In the Votaries of pomp and parade.

OTHERS again ſeem more to attach themſelves to what have been well termed the 'pomps and vanities of this world.' Magnificent houſes, grand equipages, numerous retinues, ſplendid entertainments, high and faſhionable connections, appear to conſtitute, in their eſtimation, the ſupreme happineſs of life. This claſs too, if we miſtake not, will be found numerous in our days; for it muſt be conſidered, *that it is the heart, ſet on theſe things*, which conſtitutes the eſſential character. It often happens, that perſons, to whoſe rank and ſtation theſe indulgences moſt properly belong, are moſt indifferent to them. The undue ſolicitude about them is more viſible in perſons of inferior conditions and ſmaller fortunes, in whom it is not rarely detected by the ſtudious contrivances of a miſapplied ingenuity to reconcile parade with œconomy, and glitter at a cheap rate. But this temper of diſplay and competition is a direct

Digitized by Google

direct contraſt to the lowly, modeſt, unaſ- SECT. II.
ſuming carriage of the true Chriſtian: and wherever there is an evident effort and ſtruggle to excel in the particulars here in queſtion, a manifeſt wiſh thus to rival ſuperiors, to outſtrip equals, to dazzle inferiors; it is manifeſt the great end of life, and of all its poſſeſſions, is too little kept in view, and it is to be feared that the gratification of a vain oſtentatious humour is the predominant diſpoſition of the heart.

In the Votaries of wealth and ambition.

As there is a ſober ſenſuality, ſo is there alſo a ſober avarice, and a ſober ambition. The commercial and the profeſſional world compoſe the chief ſphere of their influence. They are often recognized and openly avowed as juſt maſter principles of action. But where this is not the caſe, they aſſume ſuch plauſible ſhapes, are called by ſuch ſpecious names, and urge ſuch powerful pleas, that they are received with cordiality, and ſuffered to gather ſtrength without ſuſpicion. The ſeducing conſiderations of diligence in our callings, of ſucceſs in our profeſſion, of making handſome proviſions for our children, beguile our better judgements. "We riſe early, "and late take reſt, and eat the bread of "carefulneſs." In our few intervals of lei-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ſure, our exhauſted ſpirits require refreſhment; the ſerious concerns of our immortal ſouls, are matters of ſpeculation too grave and gloomy to anſwer the purpoſe, and we fly to ſomething that may better deſerve the name of relaxation, till we are again ſummoned to the daily labours of our employment.

MEANWHILE Religion ſeldom comes in our way, ſcarcely occurs to our thoughts; and when ſome ſecret miſgivings begin to be felt on this head, company ſoon drowns, amuſements diſſipate, or habitual occupations inſenſibly diſplace or ſmother the riſing apprehenſion. Profeſſional and commercial men perhaps; eſpecially when they happen to be perſons of more than ordinary reflection, or of early habits of piety not quite worn away, eaſily quiet their conſciences by the plea, that neceſſary attention to their buſineſs leaves them no time to think on theſe ſerious ſubjects at preſent. "Men of leiſure they con-"feſs ſhould conſider them; they themſelves "will do it hereafter when they retire; "meanwhile they are uſefully or at leaſt "innocently employed." Thus buſineſs and pleaſure fill up our time, and the "one thing "needful," is forgotten. Reſpected by others, and

SECT. II.

and ſecretly applauding ourſelves (perhaps congratulating ourſelves that we are not like ſuch an one who is a ſpendthrift or a mere man of pleaſure, or ſuch another who is a notorious miſer) the true principle of action is no leſs wanting in us, and perſonal advancement, or the acquiſition of wealth, is the object of our ſupreme deſires and predominant purſuit.

It would be to preſume too much on the reader's patience to attempt a delineation of the characters of the politician, the metaphyſician, the ſcholar, the poet, the virtuoſo, the man of taſte, in all their varieties. Of theſe and many other claſſes which might be enumerated, ſuffice it to remark, and to appeal to every man's own experience for the truth of the obſervation, that they in like manner are often completely engroſſed by the objects of their ſeveral purſuits. In many of theſe caſes indeed a generous ſpirit ſurrenders itſelf wholly up with the leſs reſerve, and continues abſorbed with the fuller confidence, from the conſciouſneſs of not being led to its object by ſelf-intereſted motives. Here therefore theſe men are ardent, active, laborious, perſevering, and they think, and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ſpeak, and act, as thoſe, whoſe happineſs wholly turns on the ſucceſs or failure of their endeavours. When ſuch is the undiſturbed compoſure of mere triflers, it is leſs wonderful that the votaries of learning and of taſte, when abſorbed in their ſeveral purſuits, ſhould be able to check ſtill more eaſily any growing apprehenſion, ſilencing it by the ſuggeſtion, that they are more than harmleſsly, that they are meritoriouſly employed. "Surely the "thanks of mankind are juſtly paid to thoſe "more refined ſpirits who, ſuperior alike to "the ſeductions of eaſe, and the temptations "of avarice, devote their time and talents to "the leſs gainful labours of increaſing the "ſtores of learning or enlarging the bounda- "ries of ſcience; who are engaged in raiſing "the character and condition of ſociety, by "improving the liberal arts, and adding to "the innocent pleaſures or elegant accom- "pliſhments of life." Let not the writer be ſo far miſunderſtood, as to be ſuppoſed to in- ſinuate that Religion is an enemy to the pur- ſuits of taſte, much leſs to thoſe of learning and of ſcience. Let theſe have their *due* place in the eſtimation of mankind; but this muſt not be the *higheſt* place. Let them know their juſt *ſubordination*. They deſerve not to

Digitized by Google

be the *primary* concern, for there is another, to which in importance they bear no more proportion than our ſpan of exiſtence to eternity. SECT. II.

Conclusion from the preceding review—and general fault of all the above claſſes.

THUS the center to which the chief deſires of the heart ſhould tend, loſing its attractive force, our affections are permitted without controul to take that courſe, whatever it may be, which beſt ſuits our natural temper, or to which they are impelled by our various ſituations and circumſtances. Sometimes they manifeſtly appear to be almoſt entirely confined to a ſingle track; but perhaps more frequently the lines in which they move are ſo intermingled and diverſified, that it becomes not a little difficult, even when we look into ourſelves, to aſcertain the object by which they are chiefly attracted, or to eſtimate with preciſion the amount of their ſeveral forces, in the different directions in which they move. "Know thyſelf," is in truth an injunction with which the careleſs and the indolent cannot comply. For this compliance, it is requiſite, in obedience to the ſcripture precept, "to keep the heart with all diligence." Mankind are in general deplorably ignorant of their true ſtate; and there are few perhaps who have any adequate conception of the real ſtrength

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ſtrength of the ties, by which they are bound to the ſeveral objects of their attachment, or who are aware how ſmall a ſhare of their regard is poſſeſſed by thoſe concerns on which it ought to be ſupremely fixed.

But if it be indeed true, that except the affections of the ſoul be ſupremely fixed on God; that unleſs it be *the leading and governing deſire and primary purſuit* to poſſeſs his favour and promote his glory, we are conſidered as having transferred our fealty to an uſurper, and as being in fact revolters from our lawful ſovereign; if this be indeed the Scripture doctrine, all the ſeveral attachments which have been lately enumerated, of the different claſſes of ſociety, wherever they intereſt the affections, and poſſeſs the ſoul in any ſuch meaſure of ſtrength as deſerves to be called *predominance*, are but ſo many varied expreſſions of *diſloyalty*. God requires to ſet up his throne in the heart, and to reign in it without a rival: if he be kept out of his right, it matters not by what competitor. The revolt may be more avowed or more ſecret; it may be the treaſon of deliberate preference, or of inconſiderate levity; we may be the ſubjects of a maſter more or leſs creditable; we may be employed in ſervices

Digitized by Google

vices more groſs or more refined: but whether the ſlaves of avarice, of ſenſuality, of diſſipation, of ſloth, or the votaries of ambition, of taſte, or of faſhion; whether ſupremely governed by vanity and ſelf-love, by the deſire of literary fame or of military glory, we are alike eſtranged from the dominion of our rightful ſovereign. Let not this ſeem a harſh poſition; it can appear ſo only from not adverting to what was ſhewn to be the *eſſential nature* of true Religion. He who bowed the knee to the god of medicine or of eloquence, was no leſs an idolater than the worſhipper of the deified patrons of lewdneſs or of theft. In the ſeveral caſes which have been ſpecified, the *external acts* indeed are different, but in *principle* the diſaffection is the ſame; and unleſs we return to our allegiance, we muſt expect the title, and prepare to meet the puniſhment, of rebels on that tremendous day, when all falſe colours ſhall be done away, and (there being no longer any room for the evaſions of worldly ſophiſtry, or the ſmooth plauſibilities of worldly language) "that which is often "highly eſteemed amongſt men, ſhall appear "to have been abomination in the ſight of "God."

THESE

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

Effects of the fundamental error above mentioned on our judgements and practice in the case of *others*.

THESE fundamental truths seem vanished from the mind, and it follows of course, that every thing is viewed less and less through a religious medium. To speak no longer of instances wherein *we ourselves* are concerned, and wherein the unconquerable power of indulged appetite may be supposed to beguile our better judgement, or force us on in defiance of it; not to insist on the motives by which the conduct of men is determined, often avowedly, in what are to *themselves* the most important incidents of life; what are the judgements which they form in the case of *others?* Idleness, profusion, thoughtlessness, and dissipation, the misapplication of time or of talents, the trifling away of life in frivolous occupations or unprofitable studies; all these things we may regret in those around us, in the view of their temporal effects; but they are not considered in a religious connection, or lamented as endangering everlasting happiness. Excessive vanity and inordinate ambition are spoken of as weaknesses rather than as sins; even covetousness itself, though a hateful passion, yet, if not extreme, scarcely presents the face of *Irreligion*. Is some friend, or even some common acquaintance sick, or has some accident befallen him? How

Digitized by Google

How ſolicitouſly do we inquire after him, how tenderly do we viſit him, how much perhaps do we regret that he has not better advice, how apt are we to preſcribe for him, and how ſhould we reproach ourſelves, if we were to neglect any means in our power of contributing to his recovery! But "the mind diſeaſed" is neglected and forgotten—"*that* "is not our affair; we hope (we do not per-"haps really believe) that here it is well with "him." The truth is, we have no ſolicitude about his ſpiritual intereſt. Here he is treated like the unfortunate traveller in the Goſpel; we look upon him; we ſee but too well his ſad condition, but (Prieſt and Levite alike) we paſs by on the other ſide, and leave him to the officious tenderneſs of ſome poor deſpiſed Samaritan.

NAY, take the caſe of our very children, when our hearts being moſt intereſted to promote their happineſs, we muſt be ſuppoſed moſt deſirous of determining on right principles, and where therefore the real ſtandard of our deliberate judgements may be indiſputably aſcertained: in their education and marriage, in the choice of their profeſſions, in our comparative conſideration and judgement of the different parts of their ſeveral characters, how little do we reflect that

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

that they are immortal beings! Health, learning, credit, the amiable and agreeable qualities, above all, fortune and ſucceſs in life, are taken, and not unjuſtly taken, into the account; but how ſmall a ſhare in forming our opinions is allowed to the probable effect which may be produced on their eternal intereſts! Indeed the ſubjects of our mutual inquiries, and congratulations, and condolences, prove but too plainly what conſiderations are in theſe caſes uppermoſt in our thoughts.

Further effects—Religion degraded into a ſet of ſtatutes.

SUCH are the fatal and widely ſpreading effects, which but too naturally follow from the admiſſion of the grand fundamental error before mentioned, that of not conſidering Religion as a principle of univerſal application and command. Robbed of its beſt energies, Religion now takes the form of a cold compilation of reſtraints and prohibitions. It is looked upon ſimply as a ſet of penal ſtatutes; theſe, though wiſe and reaſonable, are however, ſo far as they extend, abridgements of our natural liberty, and nothing which comes to us in this ſhape is extremely acceptable:

Atqui nolint occidere quemquam, poſſe volunt.

Conſidering moreover, that the matter of them is not in general very palatable, and that

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

that the partiality of every man where his own cauſe is in queſtion, will be likely to make him conſtrue them liberally in his own favour, we might before-hand have formed a tolerable judgement of the manner in which they are actually treated. Sometimes we attend to the words rather than to the ſpirit of Scripture injunctions, overlooking the principle they involve, which a better acquaintance with the word of God would have clearly taught us to infer from them. At others, "the ſpirit of an injunction is "all;" and this we contrive to collect ſo dexterouſly, as thereby to relax or annul the ſtrictneſs of the terms. "Whatever is not "expreſsly forbidden cannot be *very* crimi- "nal; whatever is not poſitively enjoined, "cannot be indiſpenſably neceſſary—If we "do not offend againſt the laws, what more "can be expected from us?—The perſons to "whom the ſtrict precepts of the Goſpel "were given, were in very different circum- "ſtances from thoſe in which we are placed. "The injunctions were drawn rather tighter "than is quite neceſſary, in order to allow "for a little relaxation in practice. The "expreſſions of the ſacred Writers are figu- "rative; the Eaſtern ſtyle is confeſſedly "hyperbolical."

By

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

By theſe and other ſuch diſhoneſt ſhifts (by which however we ſeldom deceive ourſelves, except it be be in thinking that we deceive others) the pure but ſtrong morality of the word of God is explained away, and its too rigid canons are ſoftened down, with as much dexterity as is exhibited by thoſe who practiſe a logic of the ſame complexion, in order to eſcape from the obligations of human ſtatutes. Like Swift's unfortunate Brothers*, we are ſometimes put to difficulties, but our ingenuity is little inferior to their's. If totidem verbis† will not ſerve our turn, try totidem ſyllabis; if totidem ſyllabis fail, try totidem literis: then there is in our caſe, as well as in their's, "an allegorical ſenſe" to be adverted to; and if every other reſource fail us, we come at laſt to the ſame concluſion as the Brothers adopted, that after all, thoſe rigorous clauſes require ſome allowance, and a favourable interpretation, and ought to be underſtood "cum grano "ſalis."

But when the law both in its ſpirit and its letter is obſtinate and incorrigible, what we cannot bend to our purpoſe we muſt break—"Our ſins we hope are of the ſmaller order;

* Vide Tale of a Tub. † Ibid.

"a little

"a little harmleſs gallantry, a little innocent
"jollity, a few fooliſh expletives which we
"uſe from the mere force of habit, meaning
"nothing by them; a little warmth of co-
"louring and licence of expreſſion; a few
"freedoms of ſpeech in the gaiety of our
"hearts, which, though not perhaps ſtrictly
"correct, none but the over-rigid would
"think of treating any otherwiſe than as ve-
"nial infirmities, and in which very grave and
"religious men will often take their ſhare,
"when they may throw off their ſtate, and
"relax without impropriety. We ſerve an
"all-merciful Being, who knows the frailty
"of our nature, the number and ſtrength
"of our temptations, and will not be ex-
"treme to mark what is done amiſs. Even
"the leſs lenient judicatures of human in-
"ſtitution concede ſomewhat to the weak-
"neſs of man. It is an eſtabliſhed maxim—
"'De minimis non curat lex.' We hope
"we are not worſe than the generality. All
"men are imperfect. We own we have our
"infirmities; we confeſs it is ſo; we wiſh
"we were better, and truſt as we grew older
"we ſhall become ſo; we are ready to ac-
"knowledge that we muſt be indebted for
"our admiſſion into a future ſtate of happi-
"neſs, not to our own merit, but to the cle-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

" mency of God, and the mercy of our Re-
" deemer."

But let not this language be miſtaken for that of true Chriſtian humiliation, of which it is the very eſſence to feel the burden of ſin, and to long to be releaſed from it: nor let two things be confounded, than which none can be more fundamentally different, the allowed want of univerſality in our determination, and our endeavour to obey the will of God, and that defective accompliſhment of our purpoſes, which even the beſt of men will too often find reaſon to deplore. In the perſons of whom we have been now ſpeaking, the unconcern with which they can amuſe themſelves upon the borders of ſin, and the eaſy familiarity with which they can actually dally with it in its leſs offenſive ſhapes, ſhew plainly that, diſtinctly from its conſequences, it is by no means the object of their averſion; that there is no love of holineſs as ſuch; no endeavour to acquire it, no care to prepare the ſoul for the reception of this divine principle, and to expel or keep under whatever might be likely to obſtruct its entrance, or diſpute its ſovereignty.

Another effect. Religion placed in

It is indeed a moſt lamentable conſequence of the practice of regarding Religion as a com-

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

compilation of ſtatutes, and not as an internal principle, that it ſoon comes to be conſidered as being converſant about *external actions* rather than about *habits of mind.* This ſentiment ſometimes has even the hardineſs to inſinuate and maintain itſelf under the guiſe of extraordinary concern for *practical Religion*; but it ſoon diſcovers the falſehood of this pretenſion, and betrays its real nature. The expedient indeed of attaining to ſuperiority in practice, by not waſting any of the attention on the internal principles from which alone practice can flow, is about as reaſonable, and will anſwer about as well, as the œconomy of the architect, who ſhould account it mere prodigality to expend any of his materials in laying foundations, from an idea that they might be more uſefully applied to the raiſing of the ſuperſtructure. We know what would be the fate of ſuch an edifice.

external actions inſtead of habits of mind.

It is indeed true, and a truth never to be forgotten, that all pretenſions to internal principles of holineſs are vain when they are contradicted by the conduct; but it is no leſs true, that the only effectual way of improving the latter, is by a vigilant attention to the former. It was therefore our bleſſed Saviour's injunc-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

tion, "Make the tree good" as the neceſſary means of obtaining good fruit; and the holy ſcriptures abound in admonitions, to make it our chief buſineſs to cultivate our hearts with all diligence, to examine into their ſtate with impartiality, and watch over them with continual care. Indeed it is the *Heart* which conſtitutes the *Man*; and external actions derive their whole character and meaning from the motives and diſpoſitions of which they are the indications. Human judicatures, it is true, are chiefly converſant about the former, but this is only becauſe to our limited perceptions the latter can ſeldom be any otherwiſe clearly aſcertained. The real object of inquiry to human judicatures is the *internal* diſpoſition; it is to this that they adapt the nature, and proportion the degree, of their puniſhmeuts.

YET though this be a truth ſo obvious, ſo eſtabliſhed, that to have inſiſted on it may ſeem almoſt needleſs; it is a truth of which we are apt to loſe ſight in the review of our religious Character, and with which the *habit*, of conſidering Religion as conſiſting rather in external actions, than internal principles, is at direct and open war. This mode of judging may well be termed *habitual:* for though

Digitized by Google

though by ſome perſons it is adviſedly adopted, and openly avowed, yet in many caſes, for want of due watchfulneſs, it has ſtolen inſenſibly upon the mind; it exiſts unſuſpected, and is practiſed, like other habits, without conſciouſneſs or obſervation.

Evils reſulting from the laſt mentioned Error.

IN what degree ſoever this pernicious principle prevails, in the ſame degree is the miſchief it produces. The vicious affections, like noxious weeds, ſprout up and increaſe of themſelves but too naturally; while the graces of the Chriſtian temper, exotics in the ſoil of the human heart, like the more tender productions of the vegetable world, though the light and breath of Heaven muſt quicken them, require on our part alſo, in order to their being preſerved in health and vigour, conſtant ſuperintendence and aſſiduous care. But ſo far from their being earneſtly ſought for, or watchfully reared, with unremitted prayers for that Divine Grace, without which all our labours muſt be ineffectual; ſuch is the reſult of the principle we are here condemning, that no endeavours are uſed for their attainment, or they are ſuffered to droop and die almoſt without an effort to preſerve them. The culture of the mind is leſs and

Chriſtian diſpoſitions not cultivated.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

leſs attended to, and at length perhaps is almoſt wholly neglected. Way being thus made for the unobſtructed growth of other diſpoſitions, theſe naturally overſpread and quietly poſſeſs the mind; their contrariety to the Chriſtian ſpirit not being diſcerned, and even perhaps their preſence being ſcarcely acknowledged, except when their exiſtence and their nature are manifeſted in the conduct by marks too plain to be overlooked or miſtaken.

THIS is a point which we will now endeavour to aſcertain by an induction of particular inſtances.

Moſt men forget that the Chriſtian's life is a life of Faith--and the true Chriſtian's character in this reſpect.

FIRST then, it is the comprehenſive compendium of the character of true Chriſtians, that "they are walking by faith, and not by "ſight." By this deſcription is meant, not merely that they ſo firmly believe in the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments, as to be influenced by that perſuaſion to adhere in the main to the path of duty, though tempted to forſake it by preſent intereſt, and preſent gratification; but farther, that the great truths revealed in Scripture concerning the unſeen world, are the thoughts for the moſt

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

moſt part uppermoſt in their minds, and about which habitually their hearts are moſt intereſted. This ſtate of mind contributes, if the expreſſion may be allowed, to rectify the illuſions of viſion, to bring forward into nearer view thoſe eternal things which from their remoteneſs are apt to be either wholly overlooked, or to appear but faintly in the utmoſt bounds of the horizon; and to remove backward, and reduce to their true comparative dimenſions, the objects of the preſent life, which are apt to fill the human eye, aſſuming a falſe magnitude from their vicinity. The true Chriſtian knows from experience, however, that the former are apt to fade from the ſight, and the latter again to ſwell on it. He makes it therefore his continual care to preſerve thoſe juſt and enlightened views, which through Divine mercy he has obtained. Not that he will retire from that ſtation in the world which Providence ſeems to have appointed him to fill: he will be active in the buſineſs of life, and enjoy its comforts with moderation and thankfulneſs; but he will not be "totus in illis," he will not give up his whole ſoul to them, they will be habitually ſubordinate in his eſtimation to objects of more importance. This aweful truth has ſunk deep into his mind, that "the things "which are ſeen are temporal, but the things

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"which are not seen are eternal;" and in the tumult and bustle of life, he is sobered by the still small voice which whispers to him that "the fashion of this world passes away." This circumstance alone must, it is obvious, constitute a vast difference between the habitual temper of his mind, and that of the generality of nominal Christians, who are almost entirely taken up with the concerns of the present world. They *know* indeed that they are mortal, but they do not *feel* it. The truth rests in their understandings, and cannot gain admission into their hearts. This speculative persuasion is altogether different from that strong *practical* impression of the infinite importance of eternal things, which, attended with a proportionate sense of the shortness and uncertainty of all below, while it prompts to activity from a conviction that "the night cometh when no man can "work," produces a certain firmness of texture, which hardens us against the buffetings of fortune, and prevents our being very deeply penetrated by the cares and interests, the good or evil of this transitory state. Thus this just impression of the relative value of temporal and eternal things, maintains in the soul a dignified composure through all the vicissitudes of life. It quickens our diligence, yet moderates our ardour; urges us to just pursuits,

Digitized by Google

purſuits, yet checks any undue ſolicitude about the ſucceſs of them, and thereby enables us, in the language of Scripture, "to uſe this world "as not abuſing it," rendering us at once beneficial to others and comfortable to ourſelves. SECT. II.

But this is not all—beſides the diſtinction between the nominal and the real Chriſtian, which reſults from the impreſſions produced on them reſpectively by the *eternal duration* of heavenly things, there is another grounded on their *nature*, no leſs marked, nor leſs important. They are ſtated in Scripture, not only as entitling themſelves to the notice of the true Chriſtian from conſiderations of intereſt, but as approving themſelves to his judgement from a conviction of their excellence, and yet farther, as recommending themſelves to his feelings by their being ſuited to the renewed diſpoſitions of his heart. Indeed were the caſe otherwiſe, did not their qualities correſpond with his inclinations; however he might endure them on principles of duty, and be coldly conſcious of their ſuperior worth, he could not lend himſelf to them with cordial complacency, much leſs look to them as the ſureſt ſource of pleaſure. But this is the light in which they are habitually regarded

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

regarded by the true Chriſtian. He walks in the ways of Religion, not by conſtraint, but willingly; they are to him not only ſafe, but comfortable; "ways of pleaſantneſs as "well as of peace." Not but that here alſo he is from experience aware of the neceſſity of conſtant ſupport, and continual watchfulneſs; without theſe, his old eſtimate of things is apt to return on him, and the former objects of his affections to reſume their influence. With earneſt prayers, therefore, for the Divine Help, with jealous circumſpection, and reſolute ſelf-denial, he guards againſt whatever might be likely again to darken his *enlightened judgement*, or to vitiate his reformed taſte; thus making it his unwearied endeavour to grow in the knowledge and love of heavenly things, and to obtain a warmer admiration, and a more cordial reliſh of their excellence.

THAT this is a juſt repreſentation of the habitual judgement, and of the leading diſpoſition of true Chriſtians, will be abundantly evident, if, endeavouring to form ourſelves after our proper model, we conſult the ſacred Scripture. But in vain are Chriſtians there repreſented as having ſet their *affections* on things above, as *cordially rejoicing*

Digitized by Google

SECT. II.

rejoicing in the ſervice, and delighting in the worſhip of God. Pleaſure and Religion are contradictory terms with the bulk of nominal Chriſtians. They may look back indeed on their religious offices with ſomething of a ſecret ſatisfaction, and even feel it during the performance of them, from the idea of being engaged in the diſcharge of a duty; but this is altogether different from the pleaſure which attends an employment in itſelf acceptable and grateful to us. We are not condemning a deficiency merely in the *warmth* and *vehemence* of religious affections. Not to aſk whether the ſervice and worſhip of God are *delightful*, are they *pleaſant* to ſuch perſons? Do they diffuſe over the ſoul any thing of that calm complacency, that mild and grateful compoſure, which beſpeaks a mind in good humour with itſelf and all around it, and engaged in a ſervice ſuited to its taſte, and congenial with its feelings?

Sunday; and hints for its employment.

LET us appeal to that Day which is eſpecially devoted to the offices of Religion: Do they joyfully avail themſelves of this bleſſed opportunity of withdrawing from the buſineſs and cares of life; when, without being diſquieted by any doubt whether they are neglecting the duties of their proper callings,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ings, they may be allowed to detach their minds from earthly things, that by a fuller knowledge of heavenly objects, and a more habitual acquaintance with them, their hope may grow more "full of immortality?" Is the day cheerfully devoted to thoſe holy exercises for which it was appointed? Do they indeed "come into the courts of God with "gladneſs?" And how are they employed when not engaged in the public ſervices of the day? Are they buſied in ſtudying the word of God, in meditating on his perfections, in tracing his providential diſpenſations, in admiring his works, in revolving his mercies, (above all, the tranſcendent mercies of redeeming love) in ſinging his praiſes, "and "ſpeaking good of his name?" Do their ſecret retirements witneſs the earneſtneſs of their prayers and the warmth of their thankſgivings, their diligence and impartiality in the neceſſary work of ſelf-examination, their mindfulneſs of the benevolent duty of interceſſion? Is the kind purpoſe of the inſtitution of a Sabbath anſwered by them, in its being made to their ſervants and dependents a ſeaſon of reſt and comfort? Does the inſtruction of their families, or of the more poor and ignorant of their neighbours, poſſeſs its due ſhare of their time? If bleſſed with talents

Digitized by Google

or with affluence, are they ſedulouſly employing a part of this interval of leiſure in relieving the indigent, and viſiting the ſick, and comforting the ſorrowful, in forming plans for the good of their fellow-creatures, in conſidering how they may promote both the temporal and ſpiritual benefit of their friends and acquaintance: or if their's be a larger ſphere, in deviſing meaſures whereby through the Divine bleſſing, they may become the honoured inſtruments of the more extended diffuſion of religious truth? In the hours of domeſtic or ſocial intercourſe, does their converſation manifeſt the ſubject of which their hearts are full? Do their language and demeanor ſhew them to be more than commonly gentle, and kind, and friendly, free from rough and irritating paſſions?

Surely an entire day ſhould not ſeem long amidſt theſe various employments. It might well be deemed a privilege thus to ſpend it, in the more immediate preſence of our Heavenly Father, in the exerciſes of humble admiration and grateful homage; of the benevolent, and domeſtic, and ſocial feelings, and of all the beſt affections of our nature, prompted by their true motives, converſant about their proper objects, and directed to their

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

their nobleſt end; all ſorrows mitigated, all cares ſuſpended, all fears repreſſed, every angry emotion ſoftened, every envious or revengeful or malignant paſſion expelled; and the boſom, thus quieted, purified, enlarged, ennobled, partaking almoſt of a meaſure of the Heavenly happineſs, and become for a while the ſeat of love, and joy, and confidence, and harmony.

The nature, and uſes, and proper employments of a Chriſtian Sabbath, have been pointed out more particularly, not only becauſe the day will be found, when thus employed, eminently conducive, through the Divine Bleſſing, to the maintenance of the religious principle in activity and vigour; but alſo becauſe we muſt all have had occaſion often to remark, that many perſons, of the graver and more decent ſort, ſeem not ſeldom to be nearly deſtitute of religious reſources. The Sunday is with them, to ſay the beſt of it, a *heavy* day; and that larger part of it, which is not claimed by the public offices of the church, dully drawls on in comfortleſs vacuity, or without improvement is trifled away in vain and unprofitable diſcourſe. Not to ſpeak of thoſe who by their more daring profanation of this ſacred ſeaſon, openly violate the laws and

Digitized by Google

and insult the Religion of their country, how little do many seem to enter into the *spirit* of the institution, who are not wholly inattentive to its exterior decorums! How glad are they to qualify the rigor of their religious labours! How hardly do they plead against being compelled to devote the *whole* of the day to Religion, claiming to themselves no small merit for giving up to it a part, and purchasing therefore, as they hope, a right to spend the remainder more agreeably! How dexterously do they avail themselves of any plausible plea for introducing some week-day employment into the Sunday, whilst they have not the same propensity to introduce any of the Sunday's peculiar employment into the rest of the week! How often do they find excuses for taking journeys, writing letters, balancing accounts; or in short doing something, which by a little management might probably have been anticipated, or which, without any material inconvenience, might be postponed! Even business itself is recreation, compared with Religion, and from the drudgery of this day of Sacred Rest they fly for relief to their ordinary occupations.

SECT. II.

Others again who would consider business as a prophanation, and who still hold out against

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

againſt the encroachments of the card-table, get over much of the day, and gladly ſeek for an innocent reſource, in the ſocial circle or in family viſits, where it is not even pretended that the converſation turns on ſuch topics as might render it in any way conducive to religious inſtruction, or improvement. Their families meanwhile are neglected, their ſervants robbed of Chriſtian privileges, and their example quoted by others, who cannot ſee that they are themſelves leſs religiouſly employed, while playing an innocent game at cards, or relaxing in the concert room.

But all theſe ſeveral artifices, *whatever they may be, to unhallow* the Sunday and to change its character (it might be almoſt ſaid "to "mitigate its horrors,") prove but too plainly, however we may be glad to take refuge in Religion, when driven to it by the loſs of every other comfort, and to retain as it were a reverſionary intereſt in an aſylum, which may receive us when we are forced from the tranſitory enjoyments of our preſent ſtate; that *in itſelf* it wears to us a gloomy and forbidding aſpect, and not a face of conſolation and joy; that the worſhip of God is with us a *conſtrained* and not a *willing* ſervice, which

Digitized by Google

which we are glad therefore to abridge though we dare not omit it. SECT. II.

SOME indeed there are who with concern and grief will confeſs this to be their uncomfortable and melancholy ſtate; who humbly pray, and diligently endeavour, for an imagination leſs diſtracted at devotional ſeaſons: for a heart more capable of reliſhing the excellence of divine things; and who carefully guard againſt whatever has a tendency to chain down their affections to earthly enjoyments. Let not ſuch be diſcouraged. It is not they whom we are condemning: but ſuch as knowing and even acknowledging this to be their caſe, yet proceed in a way directly contrary: who, ſcarcely ſeeming to ſuſpect that any thing is wrong with them, voluntarily acquieſce in a ſtate of mind which is directly contrary to the poſitive commands of God, which forms a perfect contraſt to the repreſentations given us in Scripture of the Chriſtian character, and accords but too faithfully in one leading feature with the character of thoſe, who are ſtated to be the objects of Divine diſpleaſure in this life, and of Divine puniſhment in the next.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

Other internal defects noticed.

IT is not, however, only in these essential constituents of a devotional frame that the bulk of nominal Christians are defective. This they freely declare (secretly feeling perhaps some complacency from the frankness of the avowal) to be a higher strain of piety than that to which they aspire. Their forgetfulness also of some of the leading dispositions of Christianity, is undeniably apparent in their allowed want of the spirit of kindness, and meekness, and gentleness, and patience, and long-suffering; and, above all, of that which is the stock on which alone these dispositions can grow and flourish, that *humility* and *lowliness of mind*, in which perhaps more than in any other quality may be said to consist the true essence and vital principle of the Christian temper. These dispositions are not only neglected, but even disavowed and exploded, and their opposites, if not rising to any great height, are acknowledged and applauded. *A just pride, a proper and becoming pride*, are terms which we daily hear from Christian lips. To possess *a high spirit*, to behave with *a proper spirit* when used ill,—by which is meant a quick feeling of injuries, and a promptness in resenting them,—entitles to commendation; and a meek-spirited disposition, the highest Scripture eulogium, ex-

presses

Digitized by Google

preſſes ideas of diſapprobation and contempt. Vanity and vain-glory are ſuffered without interruption to retain their natural poſſeſſion of the heart. But here a topic opens upon us of ſuch importance, and on which ſo many miſtakes are to be found both in the writings of reſpectable authors, and in the commonly prevailing opinions of the world, that it may be allowed us to diſcuſs it more at large, and for this purpoſe to treat of it in a ſeparate ſection. SECT. III.

SECT. III.

On the Deſire of human Eſtimation and Applauſe—The generally prevailing Opinions contraſted with thoſe of the true Chriſtian.

Univerſality of the paſſions.

THE deſire of human eſtimation, and diſtinction, and honour, of the admiration and applauſe of our fellow-creatures, if we take it in its full comprehenſion, and in all its various modifications, from the thirſt of glory to the dread of ſhame, is the paſſion of which the empire is by far the moſt general, and perhaps the authority the moſt commanding. Though its power be moſt conſpicuous and leaſt controulable in the higher

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

claſſes of ſociety, it ſeems, like ſome reſiſtleſs conqueror, to ſpare neither age, nor ſex, nor condition; and taking ten thouſand ſhapes, inſinuating itſelf under the moſt ſpecious pretexts, and ſheltering itſelf when neceſſary under the moſt artful diſguiſes, it winds its way in ſecret, when it dares not openly avow itſelf, and mixes in all we think, and ſpeak, and do. It is in ſome inſtances the determined and declared purſuit, and confeſſedly the main practical principle; but where this is not the caſe, it is not ſeldom the grand ſpring of action, and in the Beauty and the Author, no leſs than in the Soldier, it is often the maſter paſſion of the ſoul.

THIS is the principle which parents recognize with joy in their infant offspring, which is diligently inſtilled and nurtured in advancing years, which, under the names of honourable ambition and of laudable emulation, it is the profeſſed aim of ſchools and colleges to excite and cheriſh. The writer is well aware that it will be thought he is puſhing his opinions much too far, when he ventures to aſſail this great principle of human action; "a prin- "ciple," its advocates might perhaps exclaim, "the extinction of which, if you could ſuc- "ceed in your raſh attempt, would be like "the

The common notions aſſerted.

Digitized by Google

" the annihilation in the material world of " the principle of motion; without it all were " torpid and cold and comfortleſs. We grant," they might go on to obſerve, " that we ne- " ver ought to deviate from the paths of " duty in order to procure the applauſe or to " avoid the reproaches of men, and we allow " that this is a rule too little attended to in " practice. We grant that the love of praiſe " is in ſome inſtances a ridiculous, and in " others a miſchievous paſſion; that to it we " owe the breed of coquettes and coxcombs, " and, a more ſerious evil, the noxious race " of heroes and conquerors. We too are " ready, when it appears in the ſhape of " vanity, to ſmile at it as a foible, or in that " of falſe glory, to condemn it as a crime. " But all theſe are only its perverſions; and " on account of them to contend againſt its " true forms, and its legitimate exerciſe, " were to give into the very error which you " formerly yourſelf condemned, of arguing " againſt the uſe of a ſalutary principle alto- " gether, on account of its being liable to " occaſional abuſe. When turned into the " right direction, and applied to its true " purpoſes, it prompts to every dignified and " generous enterpriſe. It is erudition in the " portico, ſkill in the lycæum, eloquence in

SECT. III.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"the ſenate, victory in the field. It forces "indolence into activity, and extorts from "vice itſelf the deeds of generoſity and vir- "tue. When once the ſoul is warmed by "its generous ardor, no difficulties deter, no "dangers terrify, no labours tire. It is this "which, giving by its ſtamp to what is vir- "tuous and honourable its juſt ſuperiority "over the gifts of birth and fortune, reſcues "the rich from a baſe ſubjection to the plea- "ſures of ſenſe, and makes them prefer a "courſe of toil and hardſhip to a life of in- "dulgence and eaſe. It prevents the man "of rank from acquieſcing in his hereditary "greatneſs, and ſpurs him forward in purſuit "of *perſonal* diſtinction, and of a nobility "which he may juſtly term his own. It "moderates and qualifies the over-great in- "equalities of human conditions; and reach- "ing to thoſe who are above the ſphere of "laws, and extending to caſes which fall "not within their province, it limits and "circumſcribes the power of the tyrant on "his throne, and gives gentleneſs to war, "and to pride, humility.

"Nor it its influence confined to public "life, nor is it known only in the great and "the ſplendid. To it is to be aſcribed a large "portion

Digitized by Google

" portion of that courteſy and diſpoſition to SECT. III.
" pleaſe, which naturally producing a mutual
" appearance of good will and a reciproca-
" tion of good offices, conſtitute much of
" the comfort of private life, and give their
" choiceſt ſweets to ſocial and domeſtic in-
" tercourſe. Nay, from the force of habit, it
" follows us even into ſolitude, and in our
" moſt ſecret retirements we often act as if
" our conduct were ſubject to human obſerva-
" tion, and we derive no ſmall complacency
" from the imaginary applauſes of an ideal
" ſpectator."

So far of the *effects* of the love of praiſe and diſtinction: and if, after enumerating ſome of theſe, you ſhould proceed to inveſtigate its nature, " We admit," it might be added, " that a haſty and misjudging world often " miſapplies commendations and cenſures: " and whilſt we therefore confeſs, that the " praiſes of the diſcerning few are alone " truly valuable; we acknowledge that it " were better if mankind were always to act " from the ſenſe of right and the love of " virtue, without reference to the opinions " of their fellow-creatures. We even allow, " that, independently of conſequences, this " were perhaps in itſelf a higher ſtrain of

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

" virtue; but it is a degree of purity which " it would be vain to expect from the " bulk of mankind. When the *intrinsic ex-* " *cellence* of this principle, however, is called " in question, let it be remembered, that " in its higher degrees it was styled, by one " who meant rather to detract from its me- " rits than to aggravate them, 'the infirmity " of *noble* minds;' and surely, that in such a " soil it most naturally springs up, and flou- " rishes, is no mean proof of its exalted ori- " gin and generous nature.

" But were these more dubious, and were " it no more than a splendid error; yet con- " sidering that it works so often in the right " direction, it were enough to urge in its " behalf, that it is a principle of real *action*, " and approved energy. That, as much as " practice is better than theory, and solid " realities than empty speculation, so much " is it to be preferred for general use before " those higher principles of morals, which " however just and excellent in themselves, " you would in vain attempt to bring home " to the 'business and bosoms of mankind' " at large. Reject not then a principle thus " universal in its influence, thus valuable in " its effects; a principle, which, by what- " ever

Digitized by Google

"ever name you may pleaſe to call it, acts "by motives and conſiderations ſuited to "our condition; and which, putting it at "the very loweſt, muſt be confeſſed, in our "preſent infirm ſtate, to be an habitual aid "and an ever preſent ſupport to the feeble-"neſs of virtue! In a ſelfiſh world it pro-"duces the effects of diſintereſtedneſs, and "when public ſpirit is extinct, it ſupplies "the want of patriotiſm. Let us therefore "with gratitude avail ourſelves of its help, "and not relinquiſh the good which it freely "offers, from we know not what vain dreams "of impracticable purity and unattainable "perfection."

The above Vindication queſtioned.

ALL this and much more might be urged by the advocates of this favourite principle. It would be, however, no difficult taſk to ſhew that it by no means merits this high eulogium. To ſay nothing of that larger part of the argument of our opponents, which betrays, and even proceeds upon, that miſchievous notion of the innocence of error, againſt which we have already entered our formal proteſt, the principle in queſtion is manifeſtly of a moſt inconſtant and variable nature; as inconſtant and variable as the innumerably diverſified modes of faſhions, habits, and opinions

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

nions in different periods and societies. What it tolerates in one age, it forbids in another; what in one country it prescribes and applauds, in another it condemns and stigmatizes! Obviously and openly, it often takes vice into its patronage, and sets itself in direct opposition to virtue. It is calculated to produce rather the *appearance* than the *reality* of excellence; and at best not to check the *love* but only the *commission* of vice. Much of this indeed was seen and acknowledged by the philosophers, and even by the poets, of the Pagan world. They declaimed against it as a mutable and inconsistent principle; they lamented the fatal effects which, under the name of false glory, it had produced on the peace and happiness of mankind. They condemned the pursuit of it when it led its followers out of the path of virtue, and taught that the praise of the wise and of the good only was to be desired.

Opinions of Pagan moralists on this head;

BUT it was reserved for the page of Scripture to point out to us distinctly, wherein it is apt to be essentially defective and vicious, and to discover to us more fully its encroaching nature and dangerous tendencies; teaching us at the same time, how, being purified from its corrupt qualities, and reduced under just

And Scripture lessons stated and illustrated.

Digitized by Google

juſt ſubordination, it may be brought into legitimate exerciſe, and be directed to its true end. SECT. III.

In the ſacred volume we are throughout reminded, that we are originally the creatures of God's formation, and continual dependents on his bounty. There too we learn the painful leſſon of man's degradation and unworthineſs. We learn that humiliation and contrition are the diſpoſitions of mind beſt ſuited to our fallen condition, and moſt acceptable in the ſight of our Creator. We learn that theſe (to the repreſſion and extinction of that ſpirit of arrogance and ſelf-importance, ſo natural to the heart of man) it ſhould be our habitual care to cheriſh and cultivate; ſtudiouſly maintaining a continual ſenſe, that, not only for all the *natural* advantages over others which we may poſſeſs, but that for all our *moral* ſuperiority alſo, we are altogether indebted to the unmerited goodneſs of God. It might perhaps be ſaid to be the great end and purpoſe of all revelation, and eſpecially to be the deſign of the Goſpel, to reclaim us from our natural pride and ſelfiſhneſs, and their fatal conſequences; to bring us to a juſt ſenſe of our weakneſs and *depravity*; and to diſpoſe us, with unfeigned

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

feigned humiliation, to abaſe ourſelves, and give glory to God. "No fleſh may glory in "his preſence; he that glorieth, let him "glory in the Lord"—"The lofty looks of "man ſhall be humbled, and the haughtineſs "of men ſhall be bowed down, and the Lord "alone ſhall be exalted *."

THESE ſolemn admonitions are too generally diſregarded, and their intimate connection with the ſubject we are now conſidering, appears to have been often entirely overlooked, even by Chriſtian moraliſts. Theſe authors, without reference to the main ſpring, and internal principle of conduct, are apt to ſpeak of the love of human applauſe, as being meritorious or culpable, as being the deſire of true or of falſe glory, accordingly as the external actions it produces, and the purſuits to which it prompts, are beneficial or miſchievous to mankind. But it is undeniably manifeſt, that in the judgement of the word of God, the love of worldly admiration and applauſe is in its *nature* eſſentially and radically corrupt; ſo far as it partakes of a diſpoſition to exalt and aggrandize ourſelves, to pride ourſelves on our

* Iſaiah, ii. 11.

natural

Digitized by Google

natural or acquired endowments, or to assume to ourselves the merit and credit of our good qualities, instead of ascribing all the honour and glory where only they are due. Its *guilt* therefore in these cases is not to be measured by its effects on the happiness of mankind; nor is it to be denominated *true or false* glory accordingly as the ends to which it is directed are beneficial or mischievous, just or unjust objects of pursuit; but it is *false*, because it exalts that which ought to be abased, and *criminal*, because it encroaches on the prerogative of God. SECT. III.

THE Scriptures further instruct us, not merely that mankind are liable to error, and therefore that the world's commendations *may be* sometimes mistaken; but that their judgement being darkened and their hearts depraved, its applauses and contempt will for the most part be systematically misplaced; that though the beneficent and disinterested spirit of Christianity, and her obvious tendency to promote domestic comfort and general happiness, cannot but extort applause; yet that her aspiring after more than ordinary excellence, by exciting secret misgivings in others, or a painful sense of inferiority not unmixed with envy, cannot fail often

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

often to diſguſt and offend. The word of God teaches us, that though ſuch of the doctrines and precepts of Chriſtianity, as are coincident with worldly intereſts and purſuits, and with worldly principles and ſyſtems, may be profeſſed without offence; yet, that what is oppoſite to theſe, or even different from them, will be deemed needleſsly preciſe and ſtrict, the indulgence of a moroſe and gloomy humour, the ſymptoms of a contracted and ſuperſtitious ſpirit, the marks of a mean, enſlaved, or diſtorted underſtanding. That for theſe and other reaſons, the follower of Chriſt muſt not only make up his mind to the *occaſional relinquiſhment* of worldly favour, but that it ſhould even afford him matter of holy jealouſy and ſuſpicion of himſelf, when it is very laviſhly and very generally beſtowed.

But though the ſtandard of worldly eſtimation differed leſs from that of the Goſpel; yet ſince our affections ought to be ſet on heavenly things, and converſant about heavenly objects; and ſince in particular the love and favour of God ought to be the matter of our ſupreme and habitual deſire, to which every other ſhould be rendered ſubordinate, it follows, that the love of human applauſe

Digitized by Google

plauſe muſt be manifeſtly injurious, ſo far as tends to draw down our regards to earthly concerns, and to circumſcribe our deſires within the narrow limits of this world. Particularly, that it is *impure*, ſo far as it is tinctured with a diſpoſition to eſtimate too highly, and love too well, the good opinion and commendations of man.

SECT. III.

But though, by theſe and other inſtructions and conſiderations, the Holy Scripture warns us againſt the inordinate deſire or earneſt purſuit of worldly eſtimation and honour; though it ſo greatly reduces their value, and prepares us for loſing them without ſurpriſe, and for relinquiſhing them with little reluctance: yet it teaches us, that Chriſtians in general are not only not called upon abſolutely and voluntarily to renounce or forego them; but that when, without our having ſolicitouſly ſought them, they are beſtowed on us for actions intrinſically good, we are to accept them as being intended by Providence, to be ſometimes, even in this diſorderly ſtate of things, a preſent ſolace, and a reward to virtue. Nay more, we are inſtructed, that in our general deportment, that in little particulars of conduct otherwiſe indifferent, that in the *circumſtances* and *manner* of

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

of performing actions in themſelves of a determined character and indiſpenſable obligation, (guarding however againſt the ſmalleſt degree of artifice or deceit) that by watching for opportunities of doing little kindneſſes, that by avoiding ſingularities, and even humouring prejudices, where it may be done without the ſlighteſt infringement on truth or duty, we ought to have a due reſpect and regard to the approbation and favour of men. Theſe however we ſhould not value, chiefly as they may adminiſter to our own gratification, but rather as furniſhing means and inſtruments of influence, which we may turn to good account, by making them ſubſervient to the improvement and happineſs of our fellow-creatures, and thus conducive to the *glory of God.* The remark is almoſt ſuperfluous, that on occaſions like theſe we muſt even watch our hearts with the moſt jealous care, leſt pride and ſelf-love inſenſibly infuſe themſelves, and corrupt the purity of principles ſo liable to contract a taint.

CREDIT and reputation, in the judgement of the true Chriſtian, ſtand on ground not very different from riches; which he is not to prize highly, or to deſire and purſue with ſolicitude; but which, when they are allotted to

Digitized by Google

SECT. III.

to him by the hand of Providence, he is to accept with thankfulneſs, and uſe with moderation; relinquiſhing them when it becomes neceſſary, without a murmur; guarding moſt circumſpectly, ſo long as they remain with him, againſt that ſenſual and ſelfiſh temper, and no leſs againſt that pride and wantonneſs of heart, which they are too apt to produce and cheriſh; thus conſidering them as in themſelves acceptable, but, from the infirmity of his nature, as highly dangerous poſſeſſions, and valuing them chiefly not as inſtruments of luxury or ſplendour, but as affording the means of honouring his heavenly Benefactor, and leſſening the miſeries of mankind.

CHRISTIANITY however, be it remembered, propoſes not to extinguiſh our natural deſires, but to bring them under juſt controul, and direct them to their true objects. In the caſe both of riches and of honour, ſhe maintains the conſiſtency of her character. While ſhe commands us not to ſet our hearts on *earthly* treaſures, ſhe reminds us that "we have in *Heaven* a better and "more enduring ſubſtance" than this world can beſtow; and while ſhe repreſſes our ſolicitude reſpecting earthly credit, and moderates

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

derates our attachment to it, ſhe holds forth to us, and bids us habitually to aſpire after, the ſplendours of that better ſtate, where is true glory, and honour, and immortality; thus exciting in us a juſt ambition, ſuited to our high origin, and worthy of our large capacities, which the little, miſplaced, and periſhable diſtinctions of this life would in vain attempt to ſatisfy.

Generally prevailing Notions oppoſed to thoſe of Scripture.

It would be mere waſte of time to enter into any laboured argument to prove at large, that the light in which worldly credit and eſtimation are regarded, by the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians, is extremely different from that in which they are placed by the page of Scripture. The *inordinate* love of *worldly glory* indeed, implies a paſſion, which from the nature of things cannot be called into exerciſe in the generality of mankind, becauſe, being converſant about great objects, it can but rarely find that field which is requiſite for its exertions. But we every where diſcover the ſame principle reduced to the dimenſions of common life, and modified and directed according to every one's ſphere of action. We may diſcover it in a ſupreme love of diſtinction, and admiration, and praiſe; in the univerſal acceptableneſs of flattery;

Digitized by Google

flattery; and, above all, in the exceſſive valuation of our worldly character, in that watchfulneſs with which it is guarded, in that jealouſy when it is queſtioned, in that ſolicitude when it is in danger, in that hot reſentment when it is attacked, in that bitterneſs of ſuffering when it is impaired or loſt. All theſe emotions, as they are too manifeſt to be diſputed, ſo are they too reputable to be denied. Diſhonour, diſgrace, and ſhame, preſent images of horror too dreadful to be faced; they are evils, which it is thought the mark of a generous ſpirit to conſider as excluding every idea of comfort and enjoyment, and to feel, in ſhort, as too heavy to be borne.

SECT. III.

THE conſequences of all this are natural and obvious. Though it be not openly avowed, that we are to follow after worldly eſtimation, or to eſcape from worldly diſrepute, when they can only be purſued or avoided by declining from the path of duty; nay, though the contrary be recognized as being the juſt opinion; yet all the effect of this ſpeculative conceſſion is ſoon done away *in fact*. Eſtimating worldly credit as of the higheſt intrinſic excellence, and worldly ſhame as the greateſt of all poſſible evils, we

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ſometimes ſhape and turn the path of duty itſelf from its true direction, ſo as it may favour our acquiſition of the one, and avoidance of the other; or when this cannot be done, we boldly and openly turn aſide from it, declaring the temptation is too ſtrong to be reſiſted.

Various proofs of the truth of our repreſentations of the opinions on this point of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians.

It were eaſy to adduce numerous proofs of the truth of theſe aſſertions. It is proved, indeed, by that general tendency in Religion to conceal herſelf from the view, (for we might hope that in theſe caſes ſhe often is by no means altogether extinct) by her being apt to vaniſh from our converſations, and even to give place to a pretended licentiouſneſs of ſentiments and conduct, and a falſe ſhew of infidelity. It is proved, by that complying acquieſcence and participation in the habits and manners of this diſſipated age, which has almoſt confounded every external diſtinction between the Chriſtian and the Infidel, and has made it ſo rare to find any one who dares incur the charge of Chriſtian ſingularity, or who can ſay with the Apoſtle that "he is not aſhamed of the Goſpel of Chriſt." It is proved (how can this proof be omitted by one to whoſe lot it has ſo often fallen to witneſs and lament, ſometimes he fears

Proof from the Houſe of Commons:

Digitized by Google

fears to afford an inſtance of it?) by that quick reſentment, thoſe bitter contentions, thoſe angry retorts, thoſe malicious triumphs, that impatience of inferiority, that wakeful ſenſe of paſt defeats, and promptneſs to revenge them, which too often change the character of a Chriſtian deliberative Aſſembly, into that of a ſtage for prize-fighters: violating at once the proprieties of public conduct, and the rules of ſocial decorum, and renouncing and chaſing away all the charities of the Religion of Jeſus!

From Dueliing.

BUT from all leſſer proofs, our attention is drawn to one of a ſtill larger ſize, and more determined character. Surely the reader will here anticipate our mention of the practice of Duelling: a practice which, to the diſgrace of a Chriſtian ſociety, has long been ſuffered to exiſt with little reſtraint or oppoſition.

THIS practice, whilſt it powerfully ſupports, chiefly reſts on, that exceſſive overvaluation of character, which teaches that worldly credit is to be preſerved at *any* rate, and diſgrace at *any* rate to be avoided. The *unreaſonableneſs* of duelling has been often

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

proved, and it has often been ſhewn to be criminal on various principles: ſometimes it has been oppoſed on grounds hardly tenable; particularly when it has been conſidered as an indication of malice and revenge *(a)*. But it ſeems hardly to have been enough noticed in what chiefly conſiſts its *eſſential* guilt; that it is a deliberate preference of the favour of man, before the favour and approbation of God, *in articulo mortis*, in an inſtance, wherein our own life, and that of a fellow-creature are at ſtake, and wherein we run the riſk of ruſhing into the preſence of our Maker in the very act of offending him. It would detain us too long, and it were ſomewhat beſide our preſent purpoſe, to enumerate the miſchievous conſequences which reſult from this practice. They are many and great; and if regard be had merely to the temporal intereſts of men, and to the well-being of ſociety, they are but poorly counterbalanced by the plea, which muſt be admitted in its behalf by a candid obſerver of human nature, of a courteſy and refinement in our modern manners unknown to ancient times.

Duelling, wherein its guilt chiefly conſiſts.

(a) Vide Hey's Tract, Rouſſeau's Eloiſa, and many periodical Eſſays and Sermons.

BUT

Digitized by Google

SECT. III.

BUT there is one obſervation which muſt not be omitted, and which ſeems to have been too much overlooked. In the judgement of that Religion which requires purity of heart, and of that Being to whom, as was before remarked, "thought is action," he cannot be eſteemed innocent of this crime, who lives in a ſettled habitual determination to commit it, when circumſtances ſhall call upon him ſo to do *. This is a conſideration which places the crime of duelling on a different footing from almoſt any other; indeed there is perhaps NO other, which mankind habitually and deliberately reſolve to practiſe whenever the temptation ſhall occur. It ſhews alſo that the crime of duelling is far more general in the higher claſſes than is commonly ſuppoſed, and that the whole ſum of the guilt which the practice produces is great, beyond what has perhaps been ever conceived! It will be the writer's comfort to have ſolemnly ſuggeſted this conſideration, to the conſciences of thoſe by whom this impious practice might be ſuppreſſed: If ſuch there be, which he is ſtrongly inclined to believe, their's is the crime, and

* Vide "Whoſoever looketh on a woman to luſt after her, hath committed adultery with her, &c." Matt. v. 28.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

their's the responsibility of suffering it to continue *(a)*.

In the foregoing observations, it has not been the writer's intention to discuss completely that copious subject, the love of worldly estimation. It would be to exceed the limits of a work like this, fully to investigate so large, and at the same time so important a topic. Enough, however, may have perhaps been said, to make it evident that this principle is of a character highly *questionable*; that it should be brought under absolute subjection, and watched with the most jealous care: That, notwithstanding its lofty pretensions, it often can by no means justly

(a) The writer cannot omit this opportunity of declaring, that he should long ago have brought this subject before the notice of Parliament, but for a perfect conviction that he should probably thereby only give encouragement to a system he wishes to see at an end. The practice has been at different periods nearly stopped by positive laws, in various nations on the Continent; and there can be little doubt of the efficacy of what has been more than once suggested—a Court of Honour, to take cognizance of such offences as would naturally fall within its province. The effects of this establishment would doubtless require to be enforced by legislative provisions, directly punishing the practice; and by discouraging at court, and in the military and naval situations, all who should directly or indirectly be guilty of it.

boast

Digitized by Google

boaſt that high origin and exalted nature, which its ſuperficial admirers are diſpoſed to concede to it. What real intrinſic eſſential value, it might be aſked, does there appear to be in a virtue, which had wholly changed its nature and character, if public opinion had been different? But it is in truth of baſe extraction, and ungenerous qualities, ſpringing from ſelfiſhneſs and vanity, and low ambition; by theſe it ſubſiſts, and thrives, and acts; and envy, and jealouſy, and detraction, and hatred, and variance, are its too faithful and natural aſſociates. It is, to ſay the beſt of it, a root which bears fruits of a poiſonous as well as of a beneficial quality. If it ſometimes ſtimulates to great and generous enterpriſes, if it urges to induſtry, and ſometimes to excellence, if in the more contracted ſphere it produces courteſy and kindneſs; yet to its account we muſt place the ambition which deſolates nations, and many of the competitions and reſentments which interrupt the harmony of ſocial life. The former indeed has been often laid to its charge, but the latter have not been ſufficiently attended to; and ſtill leſs has its *noxious* influence on the vital principle, and diſtinguiſhing graces of the Chriſtian character, been duly pointed out and enforced.

SECT. III.

Real nature of inordinate love of human eſtimation.

To

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

To read indeed the writings of certain Chriſtian moraliſts, *(a)* and to obſerve how little they ſeem diſpoſed to call it in queſtion, except where it raves in the conqueror, one ſhould be almoſt tempted to ſuſpect; that, conſidering it as a principle of ſuch potency and prevalence, as that they muſt deſpair of bringing it into juſt ſubjection, they were intent only on complimenting it into good humour (like thoſe barbarous nations which worſhip the evil Spirit through fear;) or rather, that they were making a ſort of compoſition with an enemy they could not maſter, and were willing, on condition of its giving up the trade of war, to ſuffer it to rule undiſturbed, and range at pleaſure.

But the truth is, that the reaſonings of Chriſtian moraliſts too often exhibit but few traces of the genius of Chriſtian morality. Of this poſition, the caſe before us is an inſtance. This principle of the deſire of worldly diſtinction and applauſe, is often allowed, and even commended, with too few qualifications, and too little reſerve. To covet wealth is baſe and ſordid, but to covet honour is treated as the mark of a generous and ex-

(a) Vide, in particular a paper in the Guardian, by Addison, on Honour, Vol. ii.

alted

Digitized by Google

SECT. III.

alted nature. Theſe writers ſcarcely ſeem to bear in mind, that though the principle in queſtion tends to prevent the commiſſion of thoſe groſſer acts of vice which would injure us in the general eſtimation; yet that it not only ſtops there, but that it there begins to exert almoſt an equal force in the oppoſite direction. They do not conſider how apt this principle is, even in the caſe of thoſe who move in a contracted ſphere, to fill us with vain conceits, and vicious paſſions; and, above all, how it tends to fix the affections on earthly things, and to ſteal away the heart from God. They acknowledge it to be criminal when it produces miſchievous effects, but forget how apt it is, by the ſubſtitution of a falſe and corrupt motive, to vitiate the purity of our good actions, depriving them of every thing which rendered them truly and eſſentially valuable. That, not to be too haſtily approved, becauſe it takes the ſide of virtue, it often works her ruin while it aſſerts her cauſe, and, like ſome vile ſeducer, pretends affection only the more ſurely to betray.

The true Chriſtian's conduct in relation to this principle.

It is the diſtinguiſhing glory of Chriſtianity not to reſt ſatisfied with ſuperficial appearances, but to rectify the *motives*, and purify the *heart*. The true Chriſtian, in obedience to

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

to the leſſons of Scripture, no where keeps over himſelf a more reſolute and jealous guard than where the deſire of human eſtimation and diſtinction is in queſtion. No where does he more deeply feel the inſufficiency of his unaſſiſted ſtrength, or more diligently and earneſtly pray for Divine aſſiſtance. He may well indeed watch and pray againſt the encroachments of a paſſion, which, when ſuffered to tranſgreſs its juſt limits, diſcovers a peculiar hoſtility to the diſtinguiſhing graces of the Chriſtian temper; a paſſion which muſt inſenſibly acquire force, becauſe it is in continual exerciſe; to which almoſt every thing *without* adminiſters nutriment, and the growth of which *within* is favoured and cheriſhed by ſuch powerful auxiliaries as pride and ſelfiſhneſs, the natural and perhaps inexterminable inhabitants of the human heart; of which the predominance, if eſtabliſhed, is thus ſo pernicious, and which poſſeſſes ſo many advantages for effecting its eſtabliſhment.

STRONGLY impreſſed, therefore, with a ſenſe of the indiſpenſable neceſſity of guarding againſt the progreſs of this encroaching principle, in humble reliance on ſuperior aid, the true Chriſtian thankfully uſes the means, and habitually exerciſes himſelf in the conſiderations

Digitized by Google

tions and motives, ſuggeſted to him for that purpoſe by the word of God. He is much occupied in ſearching out, and contemplating his own infirmities. He endeavours to acquire and maintain a juſt conviction of his great unworthineſs; and to keep in continual remembrance, that whatever diſtinguiſhes himſelf from others, is not properly his own, but that he is altogether indebted for it to the undeſerved bounty of Heaven. He diligently endeavours alſo, habitually to preſerve a *juſt* ſenſe of the real worth of human diſtinction and applauſe, knowing that he ſhall covet them leſs when he has learned not to overrate their value. He labours to bear in mind, how undeſervedly they are often beſtowed, how precariouſly they are always poſſeſſed. The cenſures of good men juſtly render him ſuſpicious of himſelf, and prompt him carefully and impartially to examine into thoſe parts of his character, or thoſe particulars of his conduct, which have drawn on him their animadverſions. The favourable opinion and the praiſes of good men are juſtly acceptable to him, where they accord with the teſtimony of his own heart; that teſtimony being thereby confirmed and warranted. Thoſe praiſes favour alſo and ſtrengthen the growth of mutual confidence and affection, where it is his delight

SECT. III.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

delight to form friendſhips, rich not leſs in uſe than comfort, and to eſtabliſh connections which may laſt for ever. But even in the caſe of the commendations of good men, he ſuffers not himſelf to be beguiled into an over-valuation of them, leſt he ſhould be led to ſubſtitute them in the place of conſcience. He guards againſt this by reflecting how indiſtinctly we can diſcern each other's motives, how little enter into each other's circumſtances, how miſtaken therefore may be the judgements formed of us, or of our actions, even by good men, and that it is far from improbable, that a time may come in which we may be compelled to forfeit their eſteem, by adhering to the dictates of our own conſciences.

But if he endeavours thus to ſit looſe to the favour and applauſe even of good men, much more to thoſe of the world at large: not but that he is ſenſible of their worth as means and inſtruments of uſefulneſs and influence; and under the limitations and for the ends allowed in Scripture, he is glad to poſſeſs, obſervant to acquire, and careful to retain them. He conſiders them however, if we may again introduce the metaphor, like the precious metals, as having rather an exchangeable than

Digitized by Google

than an intrinsic value, as desirable not simply in their possession, but in their use. In this view, he holds himself to be responsible for that share of them which he enjoys, and, to continue the figure, as bound not to let them lie by him unemployed, this were hoarding; not to lavish them prodigally, this would be waste; not imprudently to misapply them, this were folly and caprice: but as under an obligation to regard them as conferred on him that they might be brought into action, and as what therefore he may by no means throw away, though ready, if it be required, to relinquish them with cheerfulness; and never feeling himself at liberty, in consideration of the use he intends to make of them, to acquire or retain them unlawfully. He holds it to be his bounden duty to seek diligently for occasions of rendering them subservient to their true purposes; and when any such occasion is found, to expend them cheerfully and liberally, but with discretion and frugality; being no less prudent in determining the measure, than in selecting the objects of their application, that they may go the farther by being thus managed with economy.

SECT. III.

ACTING

CHAP. IV.

ACTING therefore on these principles, he will studiously and diligently use any degree of worldly credit he may enjoy, in removing or lessening prejudices; in conciliating goodwill, and thereby making way for the less obstructed progress of truth; and in providing for its being entertained with candour, or even with favour, by those who would bar all access against it in any rougher or more homely form. He will make it his business to set on foot and forward benevolent and useful schemes; and where they require united efforts, to obtain and preserve for them this co-operation. He will endeavour to discountenance vice, to bring modest merit into notice; to lend as it were his light to men of real worth, but of less creditable name, and perhaps of less conciliating qualities and manners; that they may thus shine with a reflected lustre, and be useful in their turn, when invested with their just estimation. But while by these and various other means he strives to render his reputation, so long as he possesses it, subservient to the great ends of advancing the cause of Religion and Virtue, and of promoting the happiness and comfort of mankind, he will not transgress the rule of the Scripture precepts in order to obtain, to cultivate, or to preserve it, resolutely disclaiming that dangerous

Digitized by Google

dangerous ſophiſtry of "doing evil that good "may come." Ready however to relinquiſh his reputation when required ſo to do, he will not throw it away; and ſo far as he allowably may, he will cautiouſly avoid occaſions of diminiſhing it, inſtead of ſtudiouſly ſeeking, or needleſsly multiplying them, as ſeems ſometimes to have been the practice of worthy but imprudent men. There will be no capricious humours, no ſelfiſh tempers, no moroſeneſs, no diſcourteſy, no affected ſeverity of deportment, no peculiarity of language, no indolent neglect, or wanton breach, of the ordinary forms or faſhions of ſociety. His reputation is a poſſeſſion capable of uſes too important to be thus ſported away; if ſacrificed at all, it ſhall be ſacrificed at the call of duty. The world ſhall be conſtrained to allow him to be amiable, as well as reſpectable in other parts of his character; though in what regards Religion, they may account him unreaſonably preciſe and ſtrict. In this no leſs than in other particulars, he will endeavour to reduce the enemies of Religion to adopt the confeſſion of the accuſers of the Jewiſh ruler, "we ſhall not find any fault or occaſion "againſt this Daniel—except concerning the "law of his God:" and even there, if he give offence, it will only be where he dares not do

SECT. III.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

otherwiſe; and if he fall into diſeſteem or diſgrace, it ſhall not be chargeable to any conduct which is juſtly diſhonourable, or even to any unneceſſary ſingularities on his part, but to the falſe ſtandard of eſtimation of a misjudging world. When his character is thus miſtaken, or his conduct thus miſconſtrued, he will not wrap himſelf up in a myſterious ſullenneſs; but will be ready, where he thinks any one will liſten to him with patience and candour, to clear up what has been dubious, to explain what has been imperfectly known, and "ſpeaking the truth "in love" to correct, if it may be, the erroneous impreſſions which have been conceived of him. He may ſometimes feel it his duty publicly to vindicate his character from unjuſt reproach, and to repel the falſe charges of his enemies; but he will carefully, however, watch againſt being led away by pride, or being betrayed into ſome breach of truth or of Chriſtian charity, when he is treading in a path ſo dangerous. At ſuch a time he will alſo guard, with more than ordinary circumſpection, againſt any undue ſolicitude about his worldly reputation for its own ſake; and when he has done what duty requires for its vindication, he will ſit down with a peaceable and quiet mind, and it will be matter of

no

Digitized by Google

SECT. III.

no very deep concern to him if his endeavours ſhould have been ineffectual. If good men in every age and nation have been often unjuſtly calumniated and diſgraced, and if, in ſuch circumſtances, even the darkneſs of paganiſm has been able contentedly to repoſe itſelf on the conſciouſneſs of innocence, ſhall one who is cheered by the Chriſtian's hope, who is aſſured alſo, that a day will ſhortly come in which whatever is ſecret ſhall be made manifeſt, and the miſtaken judgements of men, perhaps even of good men, being corrected, that "he ſhall then have praiſe of "God;" ſhall ſuch an one, I ſay, ſink? ſhall he even bend or droop under ſuch a trial? They might be more excuſable in over-valuing human reputation, to whom all beyond the grave was dark and cheerleſs. They alſo might be more eaſily pardoned for purſuing, with ſome degree of eagerneſs and ſolicitude, that glory which might ſurvive them, thus ſeeking as it were to extend the narrow ſpan of their earthly exiſtence: but far different is our caſe, to whom theſe clouds are rolled away, and "life and immortality "brought to light by the Goſpel." Not but that worldly favour and diſtinction are amongſt the beſt things this world has to offer: but the Chriſtian knows it is the very condition

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

of his calling, *not* to have his portion here; and as in the case of any other earthly enjoyments, so in that also of worldly honour, he dreads, lest his supreme affections being thereby gratified, it should be hereafter said to him "remember that thou in thy life-time "receivedst thy good things."

He is required by his holy calling to be victorious over the world; and to this victory, the conquest of the dread of its disesteem and dishonour is essentially and indispensably required. He reflects on those holy men who "had trial of cruel mockings;" he remembers that our blessed Saviour himself "was despised and rejected of men;" and what is he, that he should be exempted from the common lot, or think it much to bear the scandal of his profession? If therefore he is creditable and popular, he considers this, if the phrase may be pardoned, as something beyond his bargain; and he watches himself, with double care, lest he should grow over-fond of what he may be shortly called upon to relinquish. He meditates often on the probability of his being involved in such circumstances, as may render it necessary for him to subject himself to disgrace and obloquy; thus familiarizing himself with them betimes, and

Digitized by Google

and preparing himself, that when the trying hour arrives they may not take him unawares. SECT. III.

But the cultivation of the desire of "that "honour which cometh from God," he finds the most effectual means of bringing his mind into a proper temper, in what regards the love of human approbation. Christian! would thou indeed reduce this affection under just controul—*sursum corda!* Rise on the wings of contemplation, until the praises and the censures of men die away upon the ear, and the still small voice of conscience is no longer drowned by the din of this nether world. Here the sight is apt to be occupied with earthly objects, and the hearing to be engrossed with earthly sounds; but there thou shalt come within the view of that resplendent and incorruptible crown, which is held forth to thy acceptance in the realms of light, and thine ear shall be regaled with Heavenly melody! Here we dwell in a variable atmosphere—the prospect is at one time darkened by the gloom of disgrace, and at another the eye is dazzled by the gleamings of glory: but thou hast now ascended above this inconstant region; no storms agitate, no clouds obscure the air, and the lightnings play, and the thunders roll beneath thee.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

THUS, at choſen ſeaſons, the Chriſtian exerciſes himſelf; and when, from this elevated region he deſcends into the plain below, and mixes in the buſtle of life, he ſtill retains the impreſſions of his more retired hours. By theſe he realizes to himſelf the unſeen world; he accuſtoms himſelf to ſpeak and act as in the preſence of "an innumerable "company of angels, and of the ſpirits of "juſt men made perfect, and of God the "Judge of all;" the conſciouſneſs of *their* approbation cheers and gladdens his ſoul, under the ſcoffs and reproaches of an undiſcerning world, and to his delighted ear, their united praiſes form a *harmony* which a few diſcordant earthly voices cannot interrupt.

BUT though the Chriſtian be ſometimes enabled thus to triumph over the inordinate love of human applauſe, he does not therefore deem himſelf ſecure from its encroachments. On the contrary, he is aware, ſo ſtrong and active is its principle of vitality, that even where it ſeems extinct, let but circumſtances favour its revival, and it will ſpring forth again in renewed vigour. And as his watchfulneſs muſt thus during life know no termination, becauſe the enemy will ever be at hand; ſo it muſt be the more cloſe and vi-

gilant,

Digitized by Google

gilant, becauſe he is no where free from danger, but is on every ſide open to attack. "Sume ſuperbiam quæſitam meritis," was the maxim of a worldly moraliſt: but the Chriſtian is aware, that he is particularly aſſailable where he really excels; there he is in eſpecial danger, leſt his motives, originally pure, being inſenſibly corrupted, he ſhould be betrayed into an anxiety about worldly favour, falſe in principle or exceſſive in degree, when he is endeavouring to render his virtue amiable and reſpected in the eyes of others, and in obedience to the Scripture injunction, is willing to let his "light ſo ſhine before men, that they may "ſee his good works, and glorify his Father "which is in heaven." SECT. III.

He watches himſelf alſo on ſmall as well as on great occaſions: the latter indeed, in the caſe of many perſons, can hardly ever be expected to occur, whereas the former are continually preſenting themſelves: and thus, whilſt on the one hand they may be rendered highly uſeful in forming and ſtrengthening a juſt habit of mind with reſpect to the opinion of the world; ſo, on the other, they are the means moſt at hand for

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

enabling us to discover our own real character. Let not this be slightly passed over. If any one finds himself shrinking from disrepute or disesteem in little instances; but apt to solace himself with the persuasion, that his spirits being fully called forth to the encounter, he could boldy stand the brunt of sharper trials; let him be slow to give entertainment to so beguiling a suggestion; and let him not forget that these little instances, where no credit is to be got, and the vainest can find small room for self-complacency, furnish perhaps the truest tests whether we are ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, and are willing, on principles really pure, to bear reproach for the name of Jesus.

THE Christian too is well aware that the excessive desire of human approbation is a passion of so subtile a nature, that there is nothing into which it cannot penetrate: and from much experience, learning to discover it where it would lurk unseen, and to detect it under its more specious disguises, he finds, that elsewhere disallowed and excluded, it is apt to insinuate itself into his very religion, where it especially delights to dwell, and obstinately maintains its residence. Proud piety and ostentatious charity, and all the more

Digitized by Google

more open effects it there produces, have been often condemned, and we may discover the tendencies to them in ourselves, without difficulty. But where it appears not so large in bulk, and in shape so unambiguous, let its operation be still suspected. Let not the Christian suffer himself to be deceived by any external dissimilitudes between himself and the world around him, trusting perhaps to the sincerity of the principle to which they originally owed their rise; but let him beware lest through the insensible encroachments of the subtile usurper, his religion should at length have "only a "name to live," being gradually robbed of its vivifying principle; lest he should be chiefly preserved in his religious course by the dread of incurring the charge of levity, for quitting a path on which he had deliberately entered. Or where, on a strict and impartial scrutiny of his governing motives, he may fairly conclude this not to be the case, let him beware lest he be influenced by this principle in particular parts of his character, and especially where any external singularities are in question; closely scrutinizing his apparent motives, lest he should be prompted to his more than ordinary religious observances, and be kept from participating in

SECT. III.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

in the licentious pleasures of a dissipated age, not so much by a vigorous principle of internal holiness, as by a fear of lessening himself in the good opinion of the stricter circle of his associates, or of suffering even in the estimation of the world at large, by violating the proprieties of his assumed character.

Parting council to those who wish to bring this passion under due regulation.

To those who, in the important particular which we have been so long discussing, wish to conform themselves to the injunctions of the word of God, we must advise a laborious watchfulness, a jealous guard, a close and frequent scrutiny of their own hearts, that they may not mistake their real character, and too late find themselves to have been mistaken, as to what they had conceived to be their governing motives. Above all, let them labour, with humble prayers for the Divine assistance, to fix in themselves a deep, habitual, and practical sense of the excellence of "that honour which cometh from God," and of the comparative worthlessness of all earthly estimation and pre-eminence. In truth, unless the affections of the soul be thus predominantly engaged on the side of heavenly, in preference to that of human honour, though we may have relinquished the pur-

suit

Digitized by Google

ſuit of fame, we ſhall not have acquired that firm contexture of mind, which can bear diſgrace and ſhame without yielding to the preſſure. Between theſe two ſtates there is a wide interval, and he who, on a ſober review of his conduct and motives, finds reaſon to believe he has arrived at the one, muſt not therefore conclude he has reached the other. To the one, a little natural moderation and quietneſs of temper may be ſufficient to conduct us: but to the other, we can only attain by much diſcipline and ſlow advances; and when we think we have made great way, we ſhall often find reaſon to confeſs in the hour of trial, that we had greatly, far too greatly, over-rated our progreſs.

When engaged too in the proſecution of this courſe, we muſt be aware of the ſnares which lie in our way, and of the deceits to which we are liable: and we muſt be provided againſt theſe impoſitions, by having obtained a full and diſtinct conception of the temper of mind with regard to human favour, which is preſcribed to us in Scripture; and by continually examining our hearts and lives, to aſcertain how far they correſpond with it. This will prevent our ſubſtituting contemplation in the place of action,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

tion, and giving ourſelves too much up to thoſe religious meditations which were formerly recommended, in which we muſt not indulge to the neglect of the common *duties* of life: this will prevent our miſtaking the gratification of an indolent temper for the Chriſtian's diſregard of fame; for, never let it be forgotten, we muſt *deſerve* eſtimation, though we may not *poſſeſs* it, forcing men of the *world* to acknowledge, that we do not want their boaſted ſpring of action to ſet us in motion; but that its place is better ſupplied to us by another, which produces all the good of their's without its evil; thus demonſtrating the ſuperiority of the principle which animates us, by the ſuperior utility and excellence of its effects. This principle, in order to be pure and genuine, though nerved with more than mortal firmneſs, muſt be ſweetened by love, and tempered with humility. The former of theſe qualities will render us kind, friendly, and beneficent, preventing our being no longer on the watch to promote the happineſs or comfort of others, than whilſt we are ſtimulated by the deſire of their applauſe; the produce of which paſſion, whatever may be vaunted of its effects on ſocial intercourſe, is often nothing better than ſelfiſhneſs, but ill conceal-

ed

Digitized by Google

ed under a ſuperficial covering of exterior courteſy. SECT. III.

HUMILITY, again, reducing us in our own value, will moderate our claims on worldly eſtimation. It will check our tendency to oſtentation and diſplay, prompting us rather to avoid, than to attract notice. It will diſpoſe us to ſit down in quiet obſcurity, though, judging ourſelves impartially, we believe ourſelves better entitled to credit, than thoſe on whom it is conferred; cloſing the entrance againſt a proud, painful, and malignant paſſion, from which, under ſuch circumſtances, we can otherwiſe be hardly free, the paſſion of "high diſdain from ſenſe of "injured merit."

LOVE and humility will concur in producing a frame of mind, not more diſtinct from an ardent thirſt of glory, than from that frigid diſregard, or inſolent contempt, or oſtentatious renunciation of human favour and diſtinction, which we have ſometimes ſeen oppoſed to it. Theſe latter qualities may not unfrequently be traced to a ſlothful, ſenſual, and ſelfiſh temper; to the conſciouſneſs of being unequal to any great and generous attempts;

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

tempts; to the disappointment of schemes of ambition or of glory: to a little personal experience of the world's capricious and inconstant humour. The renunciation in these cases, however sententious, is often far from sincere; and it is even made not unfrequently, with a view to the attainment of that very distinction which it affects to disclaim. In some other of these instances, the over-valuation and inordinate desire of worldly credit, however disavowed, are abundantly evident, from the merit which is assumed for relinquishing them; or from that sour and surly humour, which betrays a gloomy and a corroded mind, galled and fretting under the irritating sense of the want of that which it most wishes to possess.

But far different is the temper of a Christian. Not a temper of sordid sensuality, or lazy apathy, or dogmatizing pride, or disappointed ambition: more truly independent of worldly estimation than philosophy with all her boasts, it forms a perfect contrast to Epicurean selfishness, and to Stoical pride, and to Cynical brutality. It is a temper compounded of firmness, and complacency, and peace, and love; and manifesting itself in acts of kindness and of courtesy; a kindness,

Digitized by Google

neſs, not pretended but genuine; a courteſy, not falſe and ſuperficial, but cordial and ſincere. In the hour of popularity it is not intoxicated, or inſolent; in the hour of unpopularity, it is not deſponding or moroſe; unſhaken in conſtancy, unwearied in benevolence, firm without roughneſs, and affiduous without ſervility. SECT. IV.

NOTWITHSTANDING the great importance of the topic which we have been inveſtigating, it will require much indulgence on the part of the reader, to excuſe the diſproportionate length into which the diſcuſſion has been almoſt inſenſibly drawn out: yet this, it is hoped, may not be without its uſes, if the writer have in any degree ſucceeded in his endeavour, to point out the dangerous qualities and unchriſtian tendencies of a principle, of ſuch general predominance throughout the higher claſſes of ſociety, and to ſuggeſt to the ſerious inquirer ſome practical hints for its regulation and controul. Since the principle too, of which we have been treating, is one of the moſt ordinary modifications of pride; the diſcuſſion may alſo ſerve in ſome degree to ſupply a manifeſt deficiency, a deficiency to be aſcribed to the fear of treſpaſſing too far on the reader's patience, in having but flightly

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ly touched on the allowed prevalence of that master passion, and on the allowed neglect of its opposite, humility.

SECT. IV.

The generally prevailing Error, of substituting amiable Tempers and useful Lives in the place of Religion, stated and confuted; with Hints to real Christians.

Generally prevailing error.

THERE is another practical error very generally prevalent, the effects of which are highly injurious to the cause of Religion; and which in particular is often brought forward when, upon Christian principles, any advocates for Christianity would press the practice of Christian virtues.

THE error to which we allude, is that of exaggerating the merit of certain amiable and useful qualities, and of considering them as of themselves sufficient to compensate for the want of the supreme love and fear of God.

IT seems to be an opinion pretty generally prevalent, that kindness and sweetness of temper;

Digitized by Google

per; ſympathizing, benevolent, and generous affections; attention to what in the world's eſtimation are the domeſtic, relative, and ſocial duties; and above all a life of general activity and uſefulneſs, may well be allowed, in our imperfect ſtate, to make up for the defect of what in ſtrict propriety of ſpeech is termed Religion. SECT. IV.

Common language on this head.

MANY indeed will unreſervedly declare, and more will hint the opinion, that "the "difference between the qualities above-"mentioned and Religion, is rather a ver-"bal or logical, than a real and eſſential "difference; for in truth what are they but "Religion in ſubſtance if not in name? Is "it not the great end of Religion, and in "particular the glory of Chriſtianity, to ex-"tinguiſh the malignant paſſions; to curb "the violence, to controul the appetites, "and to ſmooth the aſperities of man; to "make us compaſſionate and kind, and for-"giving one to another; to make us good "huſbands, good fathers, good friends, and "to render us active and uſeful in the diſ-"charge of the relative, ſocial, and civil du-"ties? We do not deny that in the general "maſs of ſociety, and particularly in the "lower orders, ſuch conduct and tempers

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"cannot be diffuſed and maintained by any "other medium than that of Religion. But "if the end be effected, ſurely it is only un- "neceſſary refinement to diſpute about the "means. It is even to forget your own prin- "ciples; and to refuſe its juſt place to ſolid "practical virtue, while you aſſign too high "a value to ſpeculative opinions."

THUS a fatal diſtinction is admitted between Morality and Religion: a great and deſperate error, of which it is the more neceſſary to take notice; becauſe many who would condemn, as too ſtrong, the language in which this opinion is ſometimes openly avowed, are yet more or leſs tinctured with the notion itſelf; and under the habitual and almoſt unperceived influence of this beguiling ſuggeſtion, are vainly ſolacing their imaginations, and repreſſing their well-grounded fears concerning *their own* ſtate; and are alſo quieting their juſt ſolicitude concerning the ſpiritual condition of *others*, and ſoothing themſelves in the neglect of friendly endeavours for their improvement.

THERE can hardly be a ſtronger proof of the curſory and ſuperficial views, with which men are apt to ſatisfy themſelves in religious

Digitized by Google

concerns, than the prevalence of the opinion here in queſtion; the falſehood and ſophiſtry of which muſt be acknowledged by any one who, admitting the authority of Scripture, will examine it with ever ſo little ſerioufneſs and impartiality of mind.

The worth of amiable tempers eſtimated by the ſtandard of unaſſiſted reaſon.

APPEALING indeed to a leſs ſtrict ſtandard, it would not be difficult to ſhew that the moral worth of theſe ſweet and benevolent tempers, and of theſe uſeful lives, is apt to be greatly over-rated. The former involuntarily gain upon our affections and diſarm our ſeverer judgements, by their kindly, complying, and apparently diſintereſted nature; by their prompting men to flatter inſtead of mortifying our pride, to ſympathize either with our joys or our ſorrows, to abound in obliging attentions and offices of courteſy; by their obvious tendency to produce and maintain harmony and comfort in ſocial and domeſtic life. It is not however unworthy of remark, that from the commendations which are ſo generally beſtowed on theſe qualities, and their rendering men univerſally acceptable and popular, there is many a falſe pretender to them, who gains a credit for them which he by no means deſerves; in whom they are no more than the proprie-

Many falſe pretenders to theſe tempers.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ties of his assumed character, or even a mask which is worn in public, only the better to conceal an opposite temper. Would you see this man of courtesy and sweetness stripped of his false covering, follow him unobserved into his family; and you shall behold, too plain to be mistaken, selfishness and spleen, harassing and vexing the wretched subjects of their unmanly tyranny; as if being released at length from their confinement, they were making up to themselves for the restraint which had been imposed on them in the world.

Real nature of amiable tempers when not grounded in Religion.

But where the benevolent qualities are genuine, they often deserve the name rather of amiable instincts, than of moral virtues. In many cases, they imply no mental conflict, no previous discipline: they are apt to evaporate in barren sensibilities, and transitory sympathies, and indolent wishes, and unproductive declarations: they possess not that strength and energy of character, which, in contempt of difficulties and dangers, produce alacrity in service, vigour and perseverance in action. Destitute of proper firmness, they often encourage that vice and folly which it is their especial duty to repress; and it is well if, from their soft complying humour, they are not

Digitized by Google

not often drawn in to participate in what is wrong, as well as to connive at it. Thus their poſſeſſors are frequently, in the eye of truth and reaſon, bad magiſtrates, bad parents, bad friends; defective in thoſe very qualities, which give to each of thoſe ſeveral relations its chief and appropriate value. And this, let it be alſo obſerved, is a defect which might well bring into queſtion that freedom from ſelfiſhneſs, which is ſo often claimed for them; inaſmuch as there is too great reaſon to fear, that it often ariſes in us chiefly from indiſpoſition to ſubmit to a painful effort, though real good-will commands the ſacrifice, or from the fear of leſſening the regard in which we are held, and the good opinion which is entertained of us. SECT. IV.

Their ſhort and precarious duration.

It ſhould farther alſo be obſerved concerning theſe qualities, when they are not rooted in religion, that they are of a ſickly and a ſhort-lived nature, and want that hardy and vigorous temperament, which is requiſite for enabling them to bear without injury, or even to ſurvive, the rude ſhocks and the variable and churliſh ſeaſons, to which in ſuch a world as this they muſt ever be expoſed. It is only a *Chriſtian* love of which it is the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

character, that "it ſuffereth long, and yet is "kind;" "that it is not eaſily provoked, "that it beareth all things, and endureth all "things." In the ſpring of youth indeed, the blood flows freely through the veins; we are fluſhed with health and confidence; hope is young and ardent, our deſires are unſated, and whatever we ſee has the grace of novelty; we are the more diſpoſed to be good-natured, becauſe we are pleaſed; pleaſed, becauſe univerſally well received. Whereever we caſt our eyes, we ſee ſome face of friendſhip, and love, and gratulation: All nature ſmiles around us. In this ſeaſon the amiable tempers of which we have been ſpeaking naturally ſpring up. The ſoil ſuits, the climate favours them. They appear to ſhoot forth vigorouſly and bloſſom in gay luxuriance. To the ſuperficial eye, all is fair and flouriſhing; we anticipate the fruits of Autumn, and promiſe ourſelves an ample produce. But by and by the ſun ſcorches, the froſt nips, the winds riſe, the rains deſcend; our golden dreams are blaſted, all our fond expectations are no more. Our youthful efforts let it be ſuppoſed have been ſucceſsful; and we riſe to wealth or eminence. A kind flexible temper and popular manners have

Digitized by Google

have produced in us, as they are too apt, a youth of eaſy ſocial diſſipation, and unproductive idleneſs; and we are overtaken too late by the conſciouſneſs of having waſted that time which cannot be recalled, and thoſe opportunities which we cannot now recover. We ſink into diſregard and obſcurity when, there being a call for qualities of more energy, indolent good nature muſt fall back. We are thruſt out of notice by accident or misfortunes. We are left behind by thoſe with whom we ſtarted on equal terms, and who, originally perhaps having leſs pretenſions and fewer advantages, have greatly outſtripped us in the race of honour: and their having got before us is often the more galling, becauſe it appears to us, and perhaps with reaſon, to have been chiefly owing to a generous eaſy good-natured humour on our part, which diſpoſed us to allow them at firſt to paſs by us without jealouſy, and led us to give place without a ſtruggle to their more lofty pretenſions. Thus we ſuffered them quietly to occupy a ſtation to which originally we had as fair a claim as they; but, this ſtation being once tamely ſurrendered, we have forfeited it for ever. Meanwhile our awkward and vain endeavours to recover it, at the ſame time that they ſhew

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

the want of ſelf-knowledge and compoſure in our riper years, as much as in our younger we had been deſtitute of exertion, ſerve only to make our inferiority more manifeſt, and to bring our diſcontent into the fuller notice of an ill-natured world, which however not unjuſtly condemns and ridicules our miſplaced ambition.

It may be ſufficient to have hinted at a few of the viciſſitudes of advancing life; let the reader's own mind fill up the catalogue. Now the boſom is no longer cheerful and placid; and if the countenance preſerve its exterior character, this is no longer the honeſt expreſſion of the heart. Proſperity and luxury, gradually extinguiſhing ſympathy, and puffing up with pride, harden and debaſe the ſoul. In other inſtances, ſhame ſecretly clouds, and remorſe begins to ſting, and ſuſpicion to corrode, and jealouſy and envy to embitter. Diſappointed hopes, unſucceſsful competitions, and fruſtrated purſuits, ſour and irritate the temper. A little perſonal experience of the ſelfiſhneſs of mankind, damps our generous warmth and kind affections; reproving the prompt ſenſibility and unſuſpecting ſimplicity of our earlier years. Above all, ingratitude

Digitized by Google

ingratitude ſickens the heart, and chills and thickens the very life's-blood of benevolence: till at length our youthful Nero, ſoft and ſuſceptible, becomes a hard and cruel tyrant; and our youthful Timon, the gay, the generous, the beneficent, is changed into a cold, ſour, ſilent miſanthrope.

Worth of uſeful lives eſtimated by the ſtandard of unaſſiſted reaſon.

AND as in the caſe of amiable tempers, ſo in that alſo of what are called uſeful lives, it muſt be confeſſed that their intrinſic worth, arguing ſtill merely on principles of reaſon, is apt to be greatly over-rated. They are often the reſult of a diſpoſition naturally buſtling and active, which delights in motion, and finds its labour more than repaid, either by the very pleaſure which it takes in its employments, or by the credit which it derives from them. Nay further; if it be granted that Religion tends in general to produce uſefulneſs, particularly in the lower orders, who compoſe a vaſt majority of every ſociety; and therefore that theſe irreligious men of uſeful lives are rather exceptions to the general rule; it muſt at leaſt be confeſſed that they are ſo far uſeleſs, or even poſitively miſchievous, as they either neglect to encourage or actually diſcourage that principle, which

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

which is the great operative ſpring of uſefulneſs in the bulk of mankind.

THUS it might well perhaps be queſtioned, eſtimating theſe men by their own ſtandard, whether the *particular* good in this caſe, is not more than counterbalanced by the *general* evil; ſtill more, if their conduct being brought to a ſtrict account, they ſhould be charged, as they juſtly ought, with the loſs of the good which, if they had manifeſtly and avowedly acted from a higher principle, might have been produced, not only directly in themſelves, but indirectly and remotely in others, from the extended efficacy of a religious example. They may be compared, not unaptly, to perſons whom ſome peculiarity of conſtitution enables to ſet at defiance thoſe eſtabliſhed rules of living, which muſt be obſerved by the world at large. Theſe healthy debauchees, however they may plead in their defence that they do themſelves no injury, would probably, but for their exceſſes, have both enjoyed their health better, and preſerved it longer, as well as have turned it to better account; and it may at leaſt be urged againſt them, that they diſparage the laws of temperance, and fatally betray others into the

Digitized by Google

the breach of them, by affording an inſtance of their being tranſgreſſed with impunity.

BUT were the merit of theſe amiable qualities greater than it is, and though it were not liable to the exceptions which have been alleged againſt it, yet could they be in no degree admitted, as a compenſation for the want of the ſupreme love and fear of God, and of a predominant deſire to promote his glory. The obſervance of one commandment, however clearly and forcibly enjoined, cannot make up for the neglect of another, which is enjoined with equal clearneſs and equal force. To allow this plea in the preſent inſtance, would be to permit men to abrogate the firſt table of the law on condition of their obeying the ſecond. But Religion ſuffers not any ſuch *compoſition* of duties. It is on the very ſelf ſame miſerable principle, that ſome have thought to atone for a life of injuſtice and rapine by the ſtrictneſs of their religious obſervances. If the former claſs of men can plead the diligent diſcharge of their duties to their fellow-creatures, the latter will urge that of their's to God. We eaſily ſee the falſehood of the plea in the latter caſe; and it is only ſelf-deceit and partiality which prevent its being equally viſible in the

Real worth of amiable tempers and uſeful lives, when not grounded in Religion, eſtimated on Chriſtian principles.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

the former. Yet ſo it is; ſuch is the unequal meaſure, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, which we deal out to God, and to each other. It would juſtly and univerſally be thought falſe confidence in the religious thief or the religious adulterer, (to admit for the ſake of argument ſuch a ſoleciſm in terms) to ſolace himſelf with the firm perſuaſion of the Divine favour: but it will, to many, appear hard and preciſe, to deny this firm perſuaſion of Divine approbation to the avowedly irreligious man of ſocial and domeſtic uſefulneſs.

WILL it here be urged, that the writer is not doing juſtice to his opponent's argument; which is not, that irreligious men of uſeful lives may be excuſed for neglecting their duties towards God, in conſideration of their exemplary diſcharge of their duties towards their fellow-creatures; but that in performing the latter they perform the former *virtually*, and *ſubſtantially*, if not in name?

CAN then our opponent deny, that the Holy Scriptures are in nothing more full and unequivocal, than in their injunctions on us ſupremely to love and fear God, and to worſhip and ſerve him continually with humble and grateful hearts; habitually regarding

Digitized by Google

regarding him as our Benefactor, and Sovereign, and Father, and abounding in ſentiments of gratitude and loyalty, and reſpectful affection? Can he deny that theſe poſitive precepts are rendered, if poſſible, ſtill more clear, and their authority ſtill more binding, by illuſtrations and indirect confirmations almoſt innumerable? And who then is that bold intruder into the counſels of infinite wiſdom, who in palpable contempt of theſe preciſe commands, thus illuſtrated alſo and confirmed, will dare to maintain that, knowing the intention with which they were primarily given, and the ends they were ultimately deſigned to produce, he may innocently neglect or violate their plain obligations; on the plea that he conforms himſelf, though in a different manner, to this primary intention, and produces, though by different means, theſe real and ultimate ends? SECT. IV.

THIS mode of arguing is one, with which, to ſay nothing of its inſolent prophaneneſs, the heart of man, prone to deceive himſelf and partial in his own cauſe, is not fit to be truſted. Here again, more cautious and jealous in the caſe of our worldly, than of our religious intereſts, we readily diſcern the fallacy of this reaſoning and proteſt againſt it, when it is attempted to be introduced into the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

the commerce of life. We ſee clearly that it would afford the means of refining away by turns every moral obligation. The adulterer might allow himſelf with a good conſcience, to violate the bed of his unſuſpecting friend, whenever he could aſſure himſelf that his crime would eſcape detection; for then, where would be the evil and miſery, the prevention of which was the real ultimate object of the prohibition of adultery? The thief, in like manner, and even the murderer, might find abundant room for the *innocent* exerciſe of their reſpective occupations, arguing from the primary intention and real objects of the commands, by which theft and murder were forbidden. There perhaps exiſts not a crime, to which this crooked morality would not furniſh ſome convenient opening.

BUT this miſerable ſophiſtry deſerves not that we ſhould ſpend ſo much time in the refutation of it. To diſcern its fallaciouſneſs, requires not acuteneſs of underſtanding, ſo much as a little common honeſty. "There is "indeed no ſurer mark of a falſe and hollow "heart, than a diſpoſition thus to quibble "away the clear injunctions of duty and con- "ſcience *(q)*:" It is the wretched reſource of

(a) Vide SMITH's Theory of Moral Sentiments.

a diſ-

Digitized by Google

a diſingenuous mind, endeavouring to eſcape from convictions before which it cannot ſtand, and to evade obligations which it dares not diſavow. SECT. IV.

THE arguments which have been adduced would ſurely be ſufficient to diſprove the extravagant pretenſions of the qualities under conſideration, though thoſe qualities were *perfect* in their *nature*. But they are not perfect. On the contrary, they are radically defective and corrupt; they are a body without a ſoul; they want the vital actuating principle, or rather they are animated and actuated by a falſe one. Chriſtianity, let me avail myſelf of the very words of a friend *(a)* in maintaining her argument, is "a Religion "of motives." *That* only is Chriſtian practice, which flows from Chriſtian principles; and none elſe will be admitted as ſuch by Him, who will be obeyed as well as worſhipped "in ſpirit and in truth."

THIS alſo is a poſition of which, in our intercourſe with our fellow-creatures, we clearly

(a) The writer hopes that the work to which he is referring is ſo well known, that he needs ſcarcely name Mrs. H. More.

diſcern

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

diſcern the juſtice, and univerſally admit the force. Though we have received a benefit at the hands of any one, we ſcarcely feel grateful, if we do not believe the intention towards us to have been friendly. Have we ſerved any one from motives of kindneſs, and is a return of ſervice made to us? We hardly feel ourſelves worthily requited, except that return be dictated by gratitude. We ſhould think ourſelves rather injured than obliged by it, if it were merely prompted by a proud unwillingneſs to continue in our debt *. What huſband, or what father, not abſolutely dead to every generous feeling, would be ſatisfied with a wife or a child; who, though he could not charge them with any actual breach of their reſpective obligations, ſhould yet confeſſedly perform them from a cold ſenſe of duty, in place of the quickening energies of conjugal and filial affection? What an inſult would it be to ſuch an one, to tell him gravely that he had no reaſon to complain!

THE unfairneſs, with which we ſuffer ourſelves to reaſon in matters of Religion, is no where more ſtriking than in the inſtance

* See SMITH's Theory of Moral Sentiments.

before

Digitized by Google

SECT. IV.

before us. It were perhaps not unnatural to ſuppoſe that, as we cannot ſee into each other's boſoms, and have no ſure way of judging any one's internal principles but by his external actions, it would have grown into an eſtabliſhed rule, that when the latter were unobjectionable, the former were not to be queſtioned; and on the other hand, that in reference to a Being who ſearches the heart, our motives, rather than our external actions, would be granted to be the juſt objects of inquiry. But we exactly reverſe theſe natural principles of reaſoning. In the caſe of our fellow-creatures, the motive is that which we principally inquire after and regard. But in the caſe of our ſupreme Judge, from whom no ſecrets are hid, we ſuffer ourſelves to believe that internal principles may be diſpenſed with, if the external action be performed!

The true Chriſtian really the moſt amiable and uſeful.

LET us not however be ſuppoſed ready to concede, in contradiction to what has been formerly contended, that where the true motive is wanting, the external actions themſelves will not generally betray the defect. Who is there that will not confeſs in the inſtance of a wife and a child who ſhould diſcharge their reſpective obligations merely

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

from a cold ſenſe of duty, that the inferiority of their actuating principle would not be confined to its *nature*, but would be diſcoverable alſo in its *effects*? Who is there that does not feel that theſe domeſtic ſervices, thus robbed of their vital ſpirit, would be ſo debaſed and degraded in our eſtimation, as to become not barely lifeleſs and unintereſting, but even diſtaſteful and loathſome? Who will deny that theſe would be performed in fuller meaſure, with more wakeful and unwearied attention, as well as with more *heart*; where with the ſame ſenſe of duty the enlivening principle of affection ſhould be alſo aſſociated?

THE enemies of Religion are ſometimes apt to compare the irreligious man, of a temper naturally ſweet and amiable, with the religious man of natural roughneſs and ſeverity; the irreligious man of natural activity, with the religious man who is naturally indolent; and thence to draw their inferences. But this mode of reaſoning is ſurely unjuſt. If they would argue the queſtion fairly, they ſhould make their compariſons between perſons of ſimilar natural qualities, and not in one or two examples, but in a maſs of inſtances. They would then be compelled to confeſs the efficacy of Religion, in heighten-

ing

Digitized by Google

ing the benevolence and increaſing the uſefulneſs of men: and to admit that, granting the occaſional but rare exiſtence of genuine and perſevering benevolence of diſpoſition and uſefulneſs of life, where the religious principle is wanting; yet that experience gives us reaſon to believe, that true Religion, while it would have implanted theſe qualities in perſons in whom before they had no place, would in general have given, to theſe very characters in whom they do exiſt, additional force in the ſame direction. It would have rendered the amiable more amiable, the uſeful more uſeful, with fewer inconſiſtencies, with leſs abatement. SECT. IV.

LET *true Chriſtians* meanwhile be ever mindful, that *they* are loudly called upon to make this argument ſtill more clear, theſe poſitions ſtill leſs queſtionable. You are every where commanded to be tender and ſympathetic, diligent and uſeful; and it is the character of that "wiſdom from above," in which you are to be proficients, that it "is "gentle and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy "and good fruits." Could the efficacy of Chriſtianity in ſoftening the heart be denied by thoſe, who ſaw in the inſtance of the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles, that it was able to Admonitions to true Chriſtians on theſe heads.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

transform a bigotted, furious, and cruel perſecutor, into an almoſt unequalled example of candour, and gentleneſs, and univerſal tenderneſs and love? Could its ſpirit of active beneficence be denied by thoſe, who ſaw its Divine Author ſo diligent and unwearied in his benevolent labours, as to juſtify the compendious deſcription which was given of him by a perſonal witneſs of his exertions, that he "went about doing good? Imitate theſe bleſſed examples: ſo ſhall you vindicate the honour of your profeſſion, and "put to ſilence "the ignorance of fooliſh men:" ſo ſhall you obey thoſe Divine injunctions of adorning the doctrine of Chriſt, and of "letting your light "ſhine before men, that they may ſee your "good works, and glorify your Father which "is in heaven." Beat the world at its own beſt weapons. Let your love be more affectionate, your mildneſs leſs open to irritation, your diligence more laborious, your activity more wakeful and perſevering. Conſider ſweetneſs of temper and activity of mind, if they naturally belong to you, as talents of ſpecial worth and utility, for which you will have to give account. Carefully watch againſt whatever might impair them, cheriſh them with conſtant aſſiduity, keep them in continual exerciſe, and direct them to their nobleſt ends.

To the naturally ſweet tempered and active.

Digitized by Google

ends. The latter of these qualities renders it less difficult, and therefore more incumbent on you, to be ever abounding in the work of the Lord; and to be copious in the production of that species of good fruit, of which mankind in general will be most ready to allow the excellence, because they best understand its nature. In *your* instance, the solid substance of Christian practice is easily susceptible of that high and beautiful polish, which may attract the attention, and extort the admiration of a careless and undiscerning world, so slow to notice, and so backward to acknowledge, intrinsic worth, when concealed under a less sightly exterior. Know then, and value as ye ought, the honourable office which is especially devolved on you. Let it be your acceptable service to recommend the discredited cause, and sustain the fainting interests of Religion, to furnish to her friends matter of sound and obvious argument, and of honest triumph; and if your best endeavours cannot conciliate, to refute at least, and confound her enemies. SECT. IV.

To the naturally rough and austere.

If on the other hand, you are conscious that you are naturally rough and austere, that disappointments have soured or prosperity has elated you, or that habits of command

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

have rendered you quick in expreſſion, and impatient of contradiction; or if, from whatever other cauſe, you have contracted an unhappy peeviſhneſs of temper, or aſperity of manners, or harſhneſs and ſeverity of language, (remember that theſe defects are by no means incompatible with an aptneſs to perform ſervices of ſubſtantial kindneſs); if nature has been confirmed by habit till at length your ſoul ſeems thoroughly tinctured with theſe evil diſpoſitions, yet do not deſpair. Remember that the Divine Agency is promiſed, "to take away the heart of "ſtone, and give a heart of fleſh," of which it is the natural property to be tender and ſuſceptible. Pray then earneſtly and perſeveringly, that the bleſſed aid of Divine Grace may operate effectually on your behalf. Beware of acquieſcing in the evil tempers which have been condemned, under the idea that they are the ordinary imperfections of the beſt of men; that they ſhew themſelves only in little inſtances; that they are only occaſional, haſty, and tranſient effuſions, when you are taken off your guard; the paſſing ſhade of your mind, and not the ſettled colour. Beware of excuſing or allowing them in yourſelf, under the notion of warm zeal for the cauſe of Religion and virtue, which you perhaps

Digitized by Google

haps own is now and then apt to carry you into ſomewhat over-great ſeverity of judgement, or ſharpneſs in reproof. Liſten not to theſe, or any other ſuch flattering excuſes, which your own heart will be but too ready to ſuggeſt to you. Scrutinize yourſelf rather with rigorous ſtrictneſs; and where there is ſo much room for ſelf-deceit, call in the aid of ſome faithful friend, and unboſoming yourſelf to him without concealment, aſk his impartial and unreſerved opinion of your behaviour and condition. Our unwillingneſs to do this, often betrays to others, (not ſeldom it firſt diſcovers to ourſelves) that we entertain a ſecret diſtruſt of our own character and conduct. Inſtead alſo of extenuating to yourſelf the criminality of the vicious tempers under conſideration, ſtrive to impreſs your mind deeply with a ſenſe of it. For this end, often conſider ſeriouſly, that theſe rough and churliſh tempers are a direct contraſt to the "meek-"neſs and gentleneſs of Chriſt;" and that Chriſtians are ſtrongly and repeatedly enjoined to copy after their great Model in theſe particulars, and to be themſelves patterns of "mercy and kindneſs, and humbleneſs of "mind, and meekneſs, and long ſuffering." They are to "put away all bitterneſs, and "wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil

SECT. IV.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"ſpeaking," not only, "being ready to every "good work, but being *gentle* unto *all* men," "ſhewing *all* meekneſs unto *all* men," "for- "bearing, forgiving," tender hearted. Remember the Apoſtle's declaration, that "if "any man bridleth not his tongue, he only "ſeemeth to be religious, and deceiveth his "own heart;" and that it is one of the characters of that love, without which all pretenſions to the name of Chriſtian are but vain, that "it doth not behave itſelf unſeemly." Conſider how much theſe acrimonious tempers muſt break in upon the peace, and deſtroy the comfort, of thoſe around you. Remember alſo that the honour of your Chriſtian profeſſion is at ſtake, and be ſolicitous not to diſcredit it: juſtly dreading leſt you ſhould diſguſt thoſe whom you ought to conciliate; and by conveying an unfavourable impreſſion of your principles and character, ſhould incur the guilt of putting an "offence "in your brother's way"; thereby "hinder- "ing the Goſpel of Chriſt," the advancement of which ſhould be your daily and aſſiduous care.

THUS having come to the full knowledge of your diſeaſe, and to a juſt impreſſion of its malignity, ſtrive againſt it with inceſſant watchfulneſs.

Digitized by Google

watchfulneſs. Guard with the moſt jealous circumſpection againſt its breaking forth into act. Force yourſelf to abound in little offices of courteſy and kindneſs; and you ſhall gradually experience in the performance of theſe a pleaſure hitherto unknown, and awaken in yourſelf the dormant principles of ſenſibility. But take not up with external amendment; guard againſt a falſe ſhew of ſweetneſs of diſpoſition; and remember that the Chriſtian is not to be ſatisfied with the world's ſuperficial courtlineſs of demeanor, but that his "Love is to be without diſſimulation." Examine carefully, whether the unchriſtian tempers, which you would eradicate, are not maintained in vigour by ſelfiſhneſs and pride; and ſtrive to ſubdue them effectually, by extirpating the roots from which they derive their nutriment. Accuſtom yourſelf to endeavour to look attentively upon a careleſs and inconſiderate world, which, while it is in ſuch imminent peril, is ſo ignorant of its danger. Dwell upon this affecting ſcene, till it has excited your pity; and this pity, while it melts the mind to Chriſtian love, ſhall inſenſibly produce a temper of habitual ſympathy and ſoftneſs. By means like theſe, perſeveringly uſed in conſtant dependence on Divine aid, you may confidentially hope to make

SECT. IV.

continual

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

continual progreſs. Among men of the world, a youth of ſoftneſs and ſweetneſs will often, as we formerly remarked, harden into inſenſibility, and ſharpen into moroſeneſs. But it is the office of Chriſtianity to reverſe this order. It is pleaſing to witneſs this bleſſed renovation: to ſee, as life advances, aſperities gradually ſmoothing down, and roughneſſes mellowing away: while the ſubject of this happy change experiences within, increaſing meaſures of the comfort which he diffuſes around him; and feeling the genial influences of that heavenly flame which can thus give life, and warmth, and action, to what had been hitherto rigid and inſenſible, looks up with gratitude to him who has ſhed abroad this principle of love in his heart;

Miraturque novas frondes et non ſua poma.

Their juſt praiſe given to amiable tempers, and uſeful lives.

LET it not be thought that in the foregoing diſcuſſion, the amiable and uſeful qualities, where they are not prompted and governed by a principle of religion, have been ſpoken of in too diſparaging terms. Nor would I be underſtood as unwilling to concede to thoſe who are living in the exerciſe of them, their proper tribute of commendation: Ineſt ſua gratia. Of ſuch perſons it muſt be ſaid, in the language of ſcripture, "they have their "reward."

Digitized by Google

"reward." They have it in the inward complacency, which a ſweet temper ſeldom fails to inſpire; in the comforts of the domeſtic or ſocial circle; in the pleaſure which from the conſtitution of our nature accompanies purſuit and action. They are always beloved in private, and generally reſpected in public life. But when devoid of Religion, if the word of God be not a fable, "they can-"not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." True practical Chriſtianity (never let it be forgotten) conſiſts in devoting the heart and life to God; in being ſupremely and habitually governed by a deſire to know, and a diſpoſition to fulfil his will, and in endeavouring under the influence of *theſe motives* to "live to his glory." Where theſe eſſential requiſites are wanting, however amiable the character may be, however creditable and reſpectable among men; yet as it poſſeſſes not the grand diſtinguiſhing eſſence, it muſt not be complimented with the name, of Chriſtianity. This however, when the external decorums of Religion are not violated, muſt commonly be a matter between God and a man's own conſcience; and we ought never to forget how ſtrongly we are enjoined to be candid and liberal in judging of the motives of others, while we are ſtrict in ſcrutinizing and

SECT. IV.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

and ſevere in queſtioning our own. And this ſtrict ſcrutiny is no where more neceſſary, becauſe there is no where more room for the operation of ſelf-deceit. We are all extremely prone to lend ourſelves to the good opinion which, however falſely, is entertained of us by others; and though we at firſt confuſedly ſuſpect, or even indubitably know, that their eſteem is unfounded, and their praiſes undeſerved, and that they would have thought and ſpoken of us very differently, if they had diſcerned our ſecret motives, or had been accurately acquainted with all the circumſtances of our conduct; we gradually ſuffer ourſelves to adopt their judgement of us, and at length feel that we are in ſome ſort injured or denied our due, when theſe falſe commendations are contradicted or with-held. Without the moſt conſtant watchfulneſs, and the moſt cloſe and impartial ſelf-examination, irreligious people of amiable tempers, and ſtill more thoſe of uſeful lives, from the general popularity of their character, will be particularly liable to become the dupes of this propenſity. Nor is it they only who have here need to be on their guard: men of real religion will alſo do well to watch againſt this deluſion. There is however another danger to which theſe are

Our amiableneſs of temper, and uſefulneſs of life, apt to deceive and miſlead us.

Digitized by Google

SECT. IV.

are ſtill more expoſed, and againſt which it is the rather neceſſary to warn them, becauſe of our having inſiſted ſo ſtrongly on their being bound to be diligent in the diſcharge of the active duties of life. In their endeavours to fulfil this obligation, let them particularly beware, leſt ſetting out on right principles, they inſenſibly loſe them in the courſe of their progreſs; leſt engaging originally in the buſineſs and buſtle of the world, from a ſincere and earneſt deſire to promote the glory of God, their minds ſhould become ſo heated and abſorbed in the purſuit of their object, as that the true motive of action, ſhould either altogether ceaſe to be an habitual principle, or ſhould at leaſt loſe much of its life and vigour; leſt their thoughts and affections being engroſſed by temporal concerns, their ſenſe of the reality of "unſeen "things" ſhould fade away, and they ſhould loſe their reliſh for the employments and offices of Religion.

Danger to true Chriſtians from mixing too much in worldly buſineſs.

THE Chriſtian's path is beſet with dangers—On the one hand, he juſtly dreads an inactive and unprofitable life; on the other, he no leſs juſtly trembles for the loſs of that ſpiritual-mindedneſs, which is the very eſſence and power of his profeſſion. This is not

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

not quite the place for the full diſcuſſion of the difficult topic now before us: and if it were, the writer of theſe ſheets is too conſcious of his own incompetencies, not to be deſirous of aſking rather than of giving advice reſpecting it. Yet, as it is a matter which has often engaged his moſt ſerious conſideration, and has been the frequent ſubject of his anxious inquiry into the writings and opinions of far better inſtructors, he will venture to deliver a few words on it, offering them with unaffected diffidence.

Advice to ſuch as ſuſpect this to be their caſe.

DOES then the Chriſtian diſcover in himſelf, judging not from accidental and occaſional feelings, on which little ſtreſs is either way to be laid, but from the permanent and habitual temper of his mind, a ſettled and ſtill more a growing, coldneſs and indiſpoſition towards the conſiderations and offices of Religion? And has he reaſon to apprehend that this coldneſs and indiſpoſition are owing to his being engaged too much or too earneſtly in worldly buſineſs, or to his being too keen in the purſuit of worldly objects? Let him carefully examine the ſtate of his own heart, and ſeriouſly and impartially ſurvey the circumſtances

Digitized by Google

ſtances of his ſituation in life; humbly praying to the Father of light and mercy, that he may be enabled to ſee his way clearly in this difficult emergency. If he finds himſelf purſuing wealth, or dignity, or reputation, with earneſtneſs and ſolicitude; if theſe things engage many of his thoughts; if his mind naturally and inadvertently runs out into contemplations of them; if ſucceſs in theſe reſpects greatly gladdens, and diſappointments diſpirit and diſtreſs his mind; he has but too plain grounds for ſelf-condemnation. "No man can ſerve "two maſters." The world is evidently in poſſeſſion of his heart, and it is no wonder that he finds himſelf dull, or rather dead, to the impreſſion and enjoyment of ſpiritual things. SECT. IV.

BUT though the marks of predominant eſtimation and regard for earthly things be much leſs clear and determinate; yet if the object which he is purſuing be one which, by its attainment, would bring him a conſiderable acceſſion of riches, ſtation, or honour, let him ſoberly and fairly queſtion and examine whether the purſuit be warrantable? here alſo, aſking the advice of ſome judicious friend; his backwardneſs to do which, in inſtances like

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

like theſe, ſhould juſtly lead him, to diſtruſt the reaſonableneſs of the ſchemes which he is proſecuting. In ſuch a caſe as this, we have good cauſe to diſtruſt ourſelves. Though the inward hope, that we are chiefly prompted by a deſire to promote the glory of our Maker, and the happineſs of our fellow creatures, by increaſing our means of uſefulneſs, may ſuggeſt itſelf to allay, yet let it not altogether remove, our ſuſpicions. It is not improbable, that beneath this plauſible maſk we conceal, more ſucceſsfully perhaps from ourſelves than from others, an inordinate attachment to the pomps and tranſitory diſtinctions of this life; and as this attachment gains the aſcendency, it will ever be found, that our perception and feeling of the ſupreme excellence of heavenly things will proportionably ſubſide.

But when the conſequences which would follow from the ſucceſs of our worldly purſuits do not render them ſo queſtionable, as in the caſe we have been juſt conſidering; yet, having ſuch good reaſon to believe that there is ſomewhere a flaw, could we but diſcern it, let us carefully ſcrutinize the whole of our conduct, taking that word in its largeſt ſenſe; in order to diſcover whether we may not be living either in the breach or in the omiſſion

Digitized by Google

omiſſion of ſome known duty, and whether it may not therefore have pleaſed God to withdraw from us the influence of his Holy Spirit; particularly inquiring, whether the duties of ſelf-examination, of ſecret and public prayer, the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and the other preſcribed means of Grace, have not been either wholly intermitted at their proper ſeaſons, or at leaſt been performed with precipitation or diſtraction? And if we find reaſon to believe, that the allotment of time, which it would be moſt for our ſpiritual improvement to aſſign to our religious offices, is often broken in upon and curtailed; let us be extremely backward to admit excuſes for ſuch interruptions and abridgements. It is more than probable, for many obvious reaſons, that even our worldly affairs themſelves will not on the long run, go on the better for encroaching upon thoſe hours, which ought to be dedicated to the more immediate ſervice of God, and to the cultivation of the inward principles of Religion. Our hearts at leaſt and our conduct will ſoon exhibit proofs of the ſad effects of this fatal negligence. They who in a crazy veſſel navigate a ſea wherein are ſhoals and currents innumerable, if they would keep their courſe or reach their port in ſafety, muſt

SECT. IV.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

carefully repair the ſmalleſt injuries, and often throw out their line and take their obſervations. In the voyage of life alſo the Chriſtian who would not make ſhipwreck of his faith, while he is habitually watchful and provident, muſt often make it his expreſs buſineſs to look into his ſtate, and aſcertain his progreſs

But to reſume my ſubject; let us when engaged in this important ſcrutiny, impartially examine ourſelves whether the worldly objects which engroſs us, are all of them ſuch as properly belong to our profeſſion, or ſtation, or circumſtances in life; which therefore we could not neglect with a good conſcience? If they be, let us conſider whether they do not conſume a larger ſhare of our time than they really require; and whether, by not trifling over our work, by deducting ſomewhat which might be ſpared from our hours of relaxation, or by ſome other little management, we might not fully ſatisfy their juſt claims, and yet have an increaſed overplus of leiſure, to be devoted to the offices of Religion.

But if we deliberately and honeſtly conclude that we ought not to give theſe worldly objects

Digitized by Google

objects less of our *time*, let us endeavour at least to give them less of our *hearts*: striving that the settled frame of our desires and affections may be more spiritual; and that in the motley intercourses of life we may constantly retain a more lively sense of the Divine presence, and a stronger impression of the reality of unseen things; thus corresponding with the Scripture description of true Christians, "walking by faith and not "by sight, and having our conversation in "Heaven." SECT. IV.

ABOVE all, let us guard against the temptation, to which we shall certainly be exposed, of lowering down our views to our state, instead of endeavouring to rise to the level of our views. Let us rather determine to know the worst of our case, and strive to be suitably affected with it; not forward to speak peace to ourselves, but patiently carrying about with us a deep conviction of our backwardness and inaptitude to religious duties, and a just sense of our great weakness and numerous infirmities. This cannot be an unbecoming temper, in those who are commanded to "work out their salvation with fear and "trembling." It prompts to constant and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

earneſt prayer. It produces that ſobriety, and lowlineſs and tenderneſs of mind, that meekneſs of demeanor and circumſpection in conduct, which are ſuch eminent characteriſtics of the true Chriſtian.

NOR is it a ſtate devoid of conſolation—"O tarry thou the Lord's leiſure, be ſtrong "and he ſhall comfort thy heart."—"They "that wait on the Lord, ſhall renew their "ſtrength."—"Bleſſed are they that mourn, "for they ſhall be comforted." Theſe Divine aſſurances ſooth and encourage the Chriſtian's diſturbed and dejected mind, and inſenſibly diffuſe a holy compoſure. The tint may be ſolemn, nay even melancholy, but it is mild and grateful. The tumult of his ſoul has ſubſided, and he is poſſeſſed by complacency, and hope, and love. If a ſenſe of undeſerved kindneſs fill his eyes with tears, they are tears of reconciliation and joy: while a generous ardour ſpringing up within him ſends him forth to his worldly labours "fervent in ſpi-"rit;" reſolving through the Divine aid to be henceforth more diligent and exemplary in living to the Glory of God, and longing meanwhile for that bleſſed time, when, "being "freed from the bondage of corruption," he ſhall

Digitized by Google

shall be enabled to render to his Heavenly Benefactor more pure and acceptable service. SECT. IV.

Exquisite Sensibility —School of Rousseau and Sterne.

AFTER having discussed so much at large the whole question concerning amiable tempers in general, it may be scarcely necessary to dwell upon that particular class of them which belongs to the head of generous emotions, or of exquisite sensibility. To these almost all that has been said above is strictly applicable; to which it may be added, that the persons in whom the latter qualities most abound, are often far from conducing to the peace and comfort of their nearest connections. These qualities indeed may be rendered highly useful instruments, when enlisted into the service of Religion. But we ought to except against them the more strongly, when not under her controul; because there is still greater danger than in the former case, that persons in whom they abound, may be flattered into a false opinion of themselves by the excessive commendations often paid to them by others, and by the beguiling complacencies of their own minds, which are apt to be puffed up with a proud though secret consciousness of their own superior acuteness and sensibility. But it is the less requisite to enlarge on this topic, because

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

it has been well diſcuſſed by many, who have unfolded the real nature of thoſe faſcinating qualities; who have well remarked, that though ſhewy and apt to catch the eye, they are of a flimſy and periſhable fabric, not of that leſs gaudy but more ſubſtantial and durable texture, which, imparting permanent warmth and comfort, will long preſerve its more ſober honours, and ſtand the wear and tear of life, and the viciſſitudes of ſeaſons. It has been ſhewn, that theſe qualities often fail us when moſt we want their aid; that their poſſeſſors can ſolace themſelves with their imaginary exertions in behalf of ideal miſery, and yet ſhrink from the labours of active benevolence, or retire with diſguſt from the homely forms of real poverty and wretchedneſs. In fine, the ſuperiority of true Chriſtian Charity and of plain practical beneficence has been ably vindicated; and the ſchool of Rouſſeau has been forced to yield to the ſchool of Chriſt, when the queſtion has been concerning the beſt means of promoting the comfort of family life, or the temporal well-being of ſociety *.

* While all are worthy of blame, who, to qualities like theſe, have aſſigned a more exalted place, than to religious and moral principle; there is one writer who, eminently culpable in this reſpect, deſerves, on another account, ſtill ſeverer

SECT. V.

Some other grand defects in the practical system of the Bulk of nominal Christians.

IN the imperfect sketch which has been drawn of the Religion of the bulk of no-

severer reprehension. Really possessed of powers to explore and touch the finest strings of the human heart, and bound by his sacred profession to devote those powers to the service of religion and virtue, he every where discovers a studious solicitude to excite indecent ideas. We turn away our eyes with disgust from open immodesty: but even this is less mischievous than that more measured style, which excites impure images, without shocking us by the grossness of the language. Never was delicate sensibility proved to be more distinct from plain practical benevolence, than in the writings of the author to whom I allude. Instead of employing his talents for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, they were applied to the pernicious purposes of corrupting the national taste, and of lowering the standard of manners and morals. The tendency of his writings is to vitiate that purity of mind, intended by Providence as the companion and preservative of youthful virtue; and to produce, if the expression may be permitted, *a morbid sensibility in the perception of indecency.* An imagination exercised in this discipline is never *clean*, but seeks for and discovers something indelicate in the most common phrases and actions of ordinary life. If the general style of writing and conversation were to be formed on that model, to which Sterne used his utmost endeavours to conciliate the minds of men, there is no estimating the effects which would soon be produced on the manners and morals of the age.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

minal Chriſtians, their fundamental error reſpecting the eſſential nature of Chriſtianity has been diſcuſſed, and traced into ſome of its many miſchievous conſequences. Several of their particular miſconceptions and allowed defects have alſo been pointed out and illuſtrated. It may not be improper to cloſe the ſurvey by noticing ſome others, for the exiſtence of which we may now appeal to almoſt every part of the preceding delineation.

Inadequate ideas of the guilt and evil of Sin.

In the firſt place, then, there appears throughout, both in the principles and allowed conduct of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians, a moſt inadequate idea of the *guilt and evil of ſin*. We every where find reaſon to remark, that, Religion is ſuffered to dwindle away into a mere matter of *police*. Hence the guilt of actions is eſtimated, not by the proportion in which, according to Scripture, they are offenſive to God, but by that in which they are injurious to ſociety. Murder, theft, fraud in all its ſhapes, and ſome ſpecies of lying, are manifeſtly, and in an eminent degree, injurious to ſocial happineſs. How different accordingly, in the moral ſcale, is the place they hold, from that which is aſſigned to idolatry, to general irreligion, to ſwearing,

Digitized by Google

ſwearing, drinking, fornication, laſciviouſneſs, ſenſuality, exceſſive diſſipation; and in particular circumſtances, to pride, wrath, malice, and revenge! SECT. V.

INDEED, ſeveral of the above-mentioned vices are held to be groſsly criminal in the lower ranks, becauſe manifeſtly ruinous to their temporal intereſts: but in the higher, they are repreſented as "loſing half their "evil by loſing all their groſsneſs," as flowing naturally from great proſperity, from the exceſs of gaiety and good humour; and they are accordingly "regarded with but a ſmall "degree of diſapprobation, and cenſured very "ſlightly or not at all *(a)*."—"Non meus "hic ſermo eſt." Theſe are the remarks of authors, who have ſurveyed the ſtage of human life with more than ordinary obſervation; one of whom in particular cannot be ſuſpected of having been miſled by religious prejudices, to form a judgement of the ſuperior orders too unfavourable and ſevere.

WILL theſe poſitions however be denied? Will it be maintained that there is not the difference already ſtated, in the moral eſti-

(a) Vide SMITH on the Wealth of Nations, Vol. iii.

mation

CHAP. IV.

mation of theſe different claſſes of vices? Will it be ſaid, that the one claſs is indeed more generally reſtrained, and more ſeverely puniſhed by human laws, becauſe more properly cognizable by human judicatures, and more directly at war with the well-being of ſociety; but that when brought before the tribunal of internal opinion they are condemned with equal rigour?

FACTS may be denied, and charges laughed out of countenance: but where the general ſentiment and feeling of mankind are in queſtion, our common language is often the cleareſt and moſt impartial witneſs; and the concluſions thus furniſhed, are not to be parried by wit, or eluded by ſophiſtry. In the preſent caſe, our ordinary modes of ſpeech furniſh ſufficient matter for the determination of the argument; and abundantly prove our diſpoſition to conſider as matters of ſmall account, ſuch ſins as are not held to be injurious to the community. We invent for them diminutive and qualifying terms, which, if not, as in the common uſes of language *, to be admitted as ſigns of approbation and

* Vide the Grammarians and Dialecticians on the Diminutives of the Italian and other languages.

good

Digitized by Google

good will, muſt at leaſt be confeſſed to be proofs of our tendency to regard them with palliation and indulgence. Free-thinking, gallantry, jollity *(a)*, and a thouſand ſimilar phraſes might be adduced as inſtances. But it is worthy of remark, that no ſuch ſoft and qualifying terms are in uſe, for expreſſing the ſmaller degrees of theft, or fraud, or forgery, or any other of thoſe offences, which are committed by men againſt their fellow-creatures, and in the ſuppreſſion of which we are intereſted by our regard to our temporal concerns.

THE charge which we are urging is indeed undeniable. In the caſe of any queſtion of honour or of moral honeſty, we are ſagacious in diſcerning and inexorable in judging the offence. No allowance is made for the ſuddenneſs of ſurpriſe, or the ſtrength of temptations. One ſingle failure is preſumed to imply the abſence of the moral or honourable principle. The memory is retentive on theſe occaſions, and the man's character is blaſted for life. Here even the mere ſuſpicion of

(a) Many more might be added, ſuch as a good fellow, a good companion, a libertine, a little free, a little looſe in talk, wild, gay, jovial, being no man's enemy but his own, &c. &c. &c. &c; above all, *having a good heart.*

having

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

having once offended can ſcarcely be got over: "There is an aukward ſtory about "that man, which muſt be explained before "he and I can become acquainted." But in the caſe of ſins againſt God, there is no ſuch watchful jealouſy, none of this rigorous logic. A man may go on in the frequent commiſſion of known ſins, yet no ſuch inference is drawn reſpecting the abſence of the religious principle. On the contrary, we ſay of him, that "though his *conduct* be a little "incorrect, his *principles* are untouched;"—that he has *a good heart:* and ſuch a man may go quietly through life, with the titles of a *mighty worthy creature*, and a *very good Chriſtian.*

But in the Word of God actions are eſtimated by a far leſs accommodating ſtandard. There we read of no little ſins. Much of our Saviour's ſermon on the mount, which many of the claſs we are condemning affect highly to admire, is expreſsly pointed againſt ſo dangerous a miſconception. *There*, no ſuch diſtinction is made between the rich and the poor. No notices are to be traced of one ſcale of morals for the higher, and of another for the lower claſſes of ſociety. Nay, the former are expreſsly guarded againſt any

ſuch

Digitized by Google

ſuch vain imagination; and are diſtinctly warned, that their condition in life is the more dangerous, becauſe of the more abundant temptations to which it expoſes them. Idolatry, fornication, laſciviouſneſs, drunkenneſs, revellings, inordinate affection, are, by the apoſtle likewiſe claſſed with theft and murder, and with what we hold in even ſtill greater abomination; and concerning them all it is pronounced alike, that "they which "do ſuch things ſhall not inherit the kingdom "of God *."

Inadequate fear of God.

In truth the inſtance which we have lately ſpecified, of the looſe ſyſtem of theſe nominal Chriſtians, betrays a fatal abſence of the principle which is the very foundation of all Religion. Their ſlight notions of the guilt and evil of ſin diſcover an utter want of all ſuitable reverence for the Divine Majeſty. This principle is juſtly termed in Scripture, "the "beginning of wiſdom," and there is perhaps no one quality which it is ſo much the ſtudious endeavour of the ſacred writers to impreſs upon the human heart †.

* Gal. v. 19—21. Col. iii. 5—9.

† Job, xxviii. 28. Pſalm, cxi. 10. Prov. i. 7.—ix. 10.

SIN

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

SIN is conſidered in Scripture as rebellion againſt the ſovereignty of God, and every different act of it equally violates his law, and, if perſevered in, diſclaims his ſupremacy. To the inconſiderate and the gay this doctrine may ſeem harſh, while, vainly fluttering in the ſunſhine of worldly proſperity, they lull themſelves into a fond ſecurity. "But the "day of the Lord will come as a thief in the "night; in which the Heavens ſhall paſs "away with a great noiſe, and the elements "ſhall melt with fervent heat; the earth alſo "and the works that are therein ſhall be "burnt up."—"Seeing then, that all theſe "things ſhall be diſſolved, what manner of "perſons ought we to be in all holy conver- "ſation and Godlineſs*?" We are but an atom in the univerſe.—Worlds upon worlds ſurround us, all probably full of intelligent creatures, to whom, now or hereafter, we may be a ſpectacle, and afford an example of the Divine procedure. Who then ſhall take upon him to pronounce what might be the iſſue, if ſin were ſuffered to paſs unpuniſhed in one corner of this univerſal empire? Who ſhall ſay what confuſion might be the conſequence, what diſorder it might ſpread through the

* 2 Peter, iii. 10, 11.

creation

Digitized by Google

creation of God?- Be this however as it may the language of Scripture is clear and decisive;- —"The wicked shall be turned into hell, "and all the people that forget God." SECT. V.

It should be carefully observed too, that these awful denunciations of the future punishment of sin derive additional weight from this consideration, that they are represented, not merely as a judicial sentence which, without violence to the settled order of things, might be remitted through the mere mercy of our Almighty Governor, but as arising out of the established course of nature; as happening in the way of natural consequence, just as a cause is necessarily connected with its effect; as resulting from certain connections and relations which rendered them suitable and becoming. It is stated, that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan are both set up in the world, and that to the one or the other of these we must belong. "The "righteous have *passed* from death unto "life"—"they are delivered from the power "of darkness, and are translated into the "kingdom of God's dear Son *." They are become "the children," and "the sub-"jects of God." While on earth, they love

* Col. i. 13.

his

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

his day, his ſervice, his people; they "ſpeak "good of his name;" they abound in his works. Even here they are in ſome degree poſſeſſed of his image, by and by it ſhall be perfected; they ſhall awake up after his "likeneſs," and being "heirs of eternal life," they ſhall receive "an inheritance incorrup-"tible and undefiled, and that fadeth not "away."

Of ſinners, on the other hand, it is declared, that "they are of their father the "devil;" while on earth, they are ſtyled "his children," "his ſervants;" they are ſaid "to do his works," "to hold of his ſide," to be, "ſubjects of his kingdom:" at length "they ſhall partake his portion," when the merciful Saviour ſhall be changed into an avenging Judge, and ſhall pronounce that dreadful ſentence, "depart from me, ye curſed, "into everlaſting fire prepared for the devil "and his angels."

Is it poſſible that theſe declarations ſhould not ſtrike terror, or at leaſt excite ſerious and fearful apprehenſion in the lighteſt and moſt inconſiderate mind? But the imaginations of men are fatally prone to ſuggeſt to them fallacious hopes in the very face of theſe poſitive

Digitized by Google

tive declarations. We cannot perſuade our- SECT. V.
" ſelves that God will in fact prove ſo ſevere." It was the very deluſion to which our firſt parents liſtened; " Ye ſhall not ſurely die."

LET me aſk theſe raſh men, who are thus diſpoſed to trifle with their immortal intereſts, had they lived in the antediluvian world, would they have conceived it poſſible that God would then execute his predicted threatening? Yet the event took place at the appointed time; the flood came and ſwept them all away; and this awful inſtance of the anger of God againſt ſin is related in the inſpired writings for our inſtruction. Still more to rouſe us to attention, the record is impreſſed in indelible characters on the ſolid ſubſtance of the very globe we inhabit; which thus, in every country upon earth, furniſhes practical atteſtations to the truth of the ſacred writings, and to the actual accompliſhment of their awful predictions. For myſelf I muſt declare, that I never can read without awe the paſſage, in which our Saviour is ſpeaking of the ſtate of the world at the time of this memorable event. The wickedneſs of men is repreſented to have been great and prevalent; yet not as we are ready to conceive, ſuch as to interrupt the courſe,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

and ſhake the very frame of ſociety. The general face of things was, perhaps, not very different from that which is exhibited in many of the European nations. It was a ſelfiſh, a luxurious, an irreligious, and an inconſiderate world. They were called, but they would not hearken; they were warned, but they would not believe—"they did "eat, they drank, they married wives, they "were given in marriage:" ſuch is the account of one of the Evangeliſts; in that of another it is ſtated nearly in the ſame words; "They were eating and drinking, marrying "and giving in marriage, and knew not "until the flood came and ſwept them all "away."

Inadequate ſenſe of the difficulty of getting to Heaven.

AGAIN, we ſee throughout, in the ſyſtem which we have been deſcribing, a moſt inadequate conception of the difficulty of becoming true Chriſtians; and an utter forgetfulneſs of its being the great buſineſs of life to ſecure our admiſſion into Heaven, and to prepare our hearts for its ſervice and enjoyments. The general notion appears to be, that, if born in a country of which Chriſtianity is the eſtabliſhed religion, we are born Chriſtians. We do not therefore look out for poſitive evidence of our really being of that

Digitized by Google

that number; but putting the *onus probandi*, (if it may be ſo expreſſed) on the wrong ſide, we conceive ourſelves ſuch *of courſe*, except our title be diſproved by poſitive evidence to the contrary. And we are ſo ſlow in giving ear to what conſcience urges to us on this ſide; ſo dexterous in juſtifying what is clearly wrong, in palliating what we cannot juſtify, in magnifying the merit of what is fairly commendable, in flattering ourſelves that our habits of vice are only occaſional acts, and in multiplying our ſingle acts into habits of virtue, that we muſt be bad indeed, to be compelled to give a verdict againſt ourſelves. Beſides, having no ſuſpicion of our ſtate, we do not ſet ourſelves in earneſt to the work of ſelf-examination; but only receive in a confuſed and haſty way ſome occaſional notices of our danger, when ſickneſs, or the loſs of a friend, or the recent commiſſion of ſome act of vice of greater ſize than ordinary, has awakened in our conſciences a more than uſual degree of ſenſibility. SECT. V.

THUS, by the generality, it is altogether forgotten, that the Chriſtian has a great work to execute; that of forming himſelf after the pattern of his Lord and Maſter, through the operation of the Holy Spirit of God, which

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

is promiſed to our fervent prayers and diligent endeavours. Unconſcious of the obſtacles which impede, and of the enemies which reſiſt their advancement; they are naturally forgetful alſo of the ample proviſion which is in ſtore, for enabling them to ſurmount the one, and to conquer the other. The ſcriptural repreſentations of the ſtate of the Chriſtian on earth, by the images of "a race," and "a warfare;" of its being neceſſary to rid himſelf of every encumbrance which might retard him in the one, and to furniſh himſelf with the whole armour of God for being victorious in the other, are, ſo far as theſe nominal Chriſtians are concerned, figures of no propriety or meaning. As little have they, in correſpondence with the Scripture deſcriptions of the feelings and language of real Chriſtians, any idea of acquiring a reliſh, while on earth, for the worſhip and ſervice of Heaven. If the truth muſt be told, their notion is rather a confuſed idea of future gratification in Heaven, in return for having put a force upon their inclinations, and endured ſo much religion while on earth.

But all this is only *nominal* Chriſtianity, which exhibits a more inadequate image of her real excellencies, than the cold copyings,

Digitized by Google

by ſome inſipid pencil, convey of the force and grace of Nature, or of Raphael. In the language of Scripture, Chriſtianity is not a geographical, but a moral term. It is not the being a native of a Chriſtian country: it is *a condition*, *a ſtate*; the poſſeſſion of a *peculiar nature*, with the *qualities* and *properties* which belong to it. SECT. V.

FARTHER than this, it is a ſtate into which we are not *born*, but into which we muſt be *tranſlated*; a nature which we do not *inherit*, but into which we are to be *created anew*. To the undeſerved grace of God, which is promiſed on our uſe of the appointed means, we muſt be indebted for the attainment of this nature; and, to acquire and make ſure of it, is that great "work of our ſalvation," which we are commanded to "work out "with fear and trembling." We are every where reminded, that this is a matter of labour and difficulty, requiring continual watchfulneſs, and unceaſing effort, and unwearied patience. Even to the very laſt, towards the cloſe of a long life conſumed in active ſervice, or in cheerful ſuffering, we find St. Paul himſelf declaring, that he conceived bodily ſelf-denial and mental diſcipline to be indiſpenſably neceſſary to his very ſafety. Chriſtians, who are really worthy of the name,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

are repreſented as being "made meet for the "inheritance of the Saints in light;" as "wait- "ing for the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt;" as "looking for and haſtening unto the com- "ing of the day of God." It is ſtated as being enough to make them happy, that "Chriſt "ſhould receive them to himſelf;" and the ſongs of the bleſſed ſpirits in Heaven, are deſcribed to be the ſame, as thoſe in which the ſervants of God on earth pour forth their gratitude and adoration.

CONSCIOUS therefore of the indiſpenſable neceſſity, and of the arduous nature of the ſervice in which he is engaged, the true Chriſtian ſets himſelf to the work with vigour, and proſecutes it with diligence. His motto is that of the painter; "*nullus dies ſine* "*linea.*" Fled as it were from a country in which the plague is raging, he thinks it not enough juſt to paſs the boundary line, but would put out of doubt his eſcape beyond the limbs of infection. Prepared to meet with difficulties, he is not diſcouraged when they occur; warned of his numerous adverſaries, he is not alarmed on their approach, or unprovided for encountering them. He knows that the beginnings of every new courſe may be expected to be rough and painful; but he is aſſured

Digitized by Google

ſured that the paths on which he is entering will ere long ſeem ſmoother, and become indeed "paths of pleaſantneſs and peace." SECT. V.

Now of the ſtate of ſuch an one the expreſſions of Pilgrim and Stranger are a lively deſcription; and all the other figures and images, by which Chriſtians are repreſented in Scripture, have in his caſe a determinate meaning and a juſt application. There is indeed none, by which the Chriſtian's ſtate on earth is in the word of God more frequently imaged, or more happily illuſtrated, than by that of a journey: and it may not be amiſs to pauſe for a while in order to ſurvey it under that reſemblance. The Chriſtian is travelling on buſineſs through a ſtrange country, in which he is commanded to execute his work with diligence, and purſue his courſe homeward with alacrity. The fruits which he ſees by the way-ſide he gathers with caution; he drinks of the ſtreams with moderation; he is thankful when the ſun ſhines, and his way is pleaſant; but if it be rough and rainy, he cares not much, he is but a traveller. He is prepared for viciſſitudes; he knows that he muſt expect to meet with them in the ſtormy and uncertain climate of this world. But he is travelling to

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"a better country," a country of unclouded light and undiſturbed ſerenity. He finds alſo by experience, that when he has had the leaſt of external comforts, he has always been leaſt diſpoſed to loiter; and if for the time it be a little diſagreeable, he can ſolace himſelf with the idea of his being thereby forwarded in his courſe. In a leſs unfavourable ſeaſon, he looks round him with an eye of obſervation; he admires what is beautiful; he examines what is curious; he receives with complacency the refreſhments which are ſet before him, and enjoys them with thankfulneſs. Nor does he churliſhly refuſe to aſſociate with the inhabitants of the country through which he is paſſing; nor, ſo far as he may, to ſpeak their language, and adopt their faſhions. But he neither ſuffers pleaſure, nor curioſity, nor ſociety, to take up too much of his time, and is ſtill intent on tranſacting the buſineſs which he has to execute, and on proſecuting the journey which he is ordered to purſue. He knows alſo that, to the very end of life, his journey will be through a country in which he has many enemies; that his way is beſet with ſnares; that temptations throng around him, to ſeduce him from his courſe or check his advancement in it; that the very air diſpoſes to drowſineſs, and

Digitized by Google

and that therefore to the very laſt it will be requiſite for him to be circumſpect and collected. Often therefore he examines whereabouts he is, how he has got forward, and whether or not he is travelling in the right direction. Sometimes he ſeems to himſelf to make conſiderable progreſs, ſometimes he advances but ſlowly, too often he finds reaſon to fear he has fallen backward in his courſe. Now he is cheered with hope, and gladdened by ſucceſs; now he is diſquieted with doubts, and damped by diſappointments. Thus while to nominal Chriſtians, Religion is a dull uniform thing, and they have no conception of the deſires and diſappointments, the hopes and fears, the joys and ſorrows, which it is calculated to bring into exerciſe; in the true Chriſtian all is life and motion, and his great work calls forth alternately the various paſſions of the ſoul. Let it not therefore be imagined that his is a ſtate of unenlivened toil and hardſhip. His very labours are "the labours of love;" if "he has need of patience," it is "the patience of hope;" and he is cheered in his work by the conſtant aſſurance of preſent ſupport, and of final victory. Let it not be forgotten, that this is the very idea given us of happineſs by one of the ableſt examiners of the human mind; "a "conſtant

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"constant employment for a desired end, with "the consciousness of a continual progress." So true is the Scripture declaration, that "Godliness has the promise of the life that "now is, as well as of that which is to "come."

Bulk of nominal Christians defective in the love of God.

OUR review of the character of the bulk of nominal Christians has exhibited abundant proofs of their allowed defectiveness in that great constituent of the true Christian character, *the love of God.* Many instances, in proof of this assertion, have been incidentally pointed out, and the charge is in itself so obvious, that it were superfluous to spend much time in endeavouring to establish it. Put the question fairly to the test. Concerning the proper marks and evidences of affection, there can be little dispute. Let the most candid investigator examine the character, and conduct, and language of the persons of whom we have been speaking; and he will be compelled to acknowledge, that so far as love towards the Supreme Being is in question, these marks and evidences are no where to be met with. It is in itself a decisive evidence of a contrary feeling in those nominal Christians, that they find no pleasure in the service and worship of God.

Their

Digitized by Google

SECT. V.

Their devotional acts reſemble leſs the free-will offerings of a grateful heart, than that conſtrained and reluctant homage, which is exacted by ſome hard maſter from his oppreſſed dependents, and paid with cold ſullenneſs, and ſlaviſh apprehenſion. It was the very charge brought by God againſt his ungrateful people of old, that, while they called him Sovereign and Father, they withheld from him the regards which ſeverally belong to thoſe reſpected and endearing appellations. Thus we likewiſe think it enough to offer to the moſt excellent and amiable of Beings, to our ſupreme and unwearied Benefactor, a dull, artificial, heartleſs gratitude, of which we ſhould be aſhamed in the caſe of a fellow-creature, who had ever ſo ſmall a claim on our regard and thankfulneſs!

* * *

It may be of infinite uſe to eſtabliſh in our minds a ſtrong and habitual ſenſe of that firſt and great commandment—"Thou ſhalt love "the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and "with all thy mind, and with all thy ſoul, "and with all thy ſtrength." This paſſion, operative and vigorous in its very nature, like a maſter ſpring, would ſet in motion and maintain in action all the complicated movements of the human ſoul. Soon alſo would it

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

it terminate many practical queſtions concerning the allowableneſs of certain compliances; queſtions which, with other ſimilar difficulties, are often only the cold offſpring of a ſpirit of reluctant ſubmiſſion, and cannot ſtand the encounter of this trying principle. If, for example, it were diſputed, whether or not the law of God were *ſo* ſtrict as had been ſtated, in condemning the ſlighteſt infraction of its precepts; yet, when, from the preciſe demands of juſtice, the appeal ſhall be made to the more generous principle of love, there would be at once an end of the diſcuſſion. Fear will deter from acknowledged crimes, and ſelf-intereſt will bribe to laborious ſervices: but it is the peculiar glory, and the very characteriſtic, of this more generous paſſion, to ſhew itſelf in ten thouſand little and undefinable acts of ſedulous attention, which love alone can pay, and of which, when paid, love alone can eſtimate the value. Love outruns the deductions of reaſoning; it ſcorns the refuge of caſuiſtry; it requires not the ſlow proceſs of laborious and undeniable proof that one action would be injurious and offenſive, or another beneficial or gratifying, to the object of its affection. The leaſt hint, the ſlighteſt ſurmiſe, is ſufficient to make it ſtart

Digitized by Google

ſtart from the former, and fly with eagerneſs to the latter. SECT. V.

The Stage.

I AM well aware that I am now about to tread on very tender ground; but it would be an improper deference to the opinions and manners of the age altogether to avoid it. There has been much argument concerning the lawfulneſs of theatrical amuſements *(a)*. Let it be ſufficient to remark, that the controverſy would be ſhort indeed, if the queſtion were to be tried by this criterion of love to the Supreme Being. If there were any thing of that ſenſibility for the honour of God, and of that zeal in his ſervice, which we ſhew in behalf of our earthly friends, or of our political connections, ſhould we ſeek our pleaſure in that place which the debauchee, inflamed with wine, or bent on the gratification of other licentious appetites, finds moſt congenial to his ſtate and temper of mind? In that place, from the neighbourhood of which, (how juſtly termed a ſchool of morals might hence alone be inferred) de-

(a) It is almoſt unneceſſary to remark, that the word is to be underſtood in a large ſenſe, as including the Opera, &c.

corum,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

corum, and modeſty, and regularity retire, while riot and lewdneſs are invited to the ſpot, and invariably ſelect it for their choſen reſidence! where the ſacred name of God is often profaned! where ſentiments are often heard with delight, and motions and geſtures often applauded, which would not be tolerated in private company, but which may far exceed the utmoſt licence allowed in the ſocial circle, without at all tranſgreſſing the large bounds of theatrical decorum! where, when moral principles are inculcated, they are not ſuch as a Chriſtian ought to cheriſh in his boſom, but ſuch as it muſt be his daily endeavour to extirpate; not thoſe which Scripture warrants, but thoſe which it condemns as falſe and ſpurious, being founded in pride and ambition, and the over-valuation of human favour! where ſurely, if a Chriſtian ſhould truſt himſelf at all, it would be requiſite for him to prepare himſelf with a double portion of watchfulneſs and ſeriouſneſs of mind, inſtead of ſelecting it as the place in which he may throw off his guard, and unbend without danger! The juſtneſs of this laſt remark, and the general tendency of theatrical amuſements, is atteſted by the ſame well inſtructed maſter in the ſcience of human

Digitized by Google

human life, to whom we had before occaſion to refer. By him they are recommended as the moſt efficacious expedient for relaxing, among any people, that "*preciſeneſs and auſterity* of morals," to uſe his own phraſe, which, under the name of holineſs, it is the buſineſs of Scripture to inculcate and enforce. Nor is this poſition merely theoretical. The experiment was tried, and tried ſucceſsfully, in a city upon the continent *(a)*, in which it was wiſhed to corrupt the ſimple morality of purer times.

LET us try the queſtion by a parallel inſtance.

(a) Geneva—It is worthy of remark, that the play-houſes have multiplied extremely in Paris ſince the revolution; and that laſt winter there were twenty open every night, and all crowded. It ſhould not be left unobſerved, and it is ſeriouſly ſubmitted to the conſideration of thoſe who regard the ſtage as a ſchool of morals, that the pieces which were beſt compoſed, beſt acted, and moſt warmly and generally applauded, were ſuch as abounded in touches of delicate ſenſibility. The people of Paris have never been imagined to be more ſuſceptible, than the generality of mankind, of theſe emotions, and this is not the particular period when the Pariſians have been commonly conceived moſt under their influence. Vide Journal d'un Voyageur Neutre. The author of the work expreſſes himſelf as aſtoniſhed by the phænomenon, and as unable to account for it.

WHAT

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

WHAT judgement ſhould we form of the warmth of that man's attachment to his Sovereign, who, at ſeaſons of recreation, ſhould ſeek his pleaſures in ſcenes as ill accordant with the principle of loyalty, as thoſe of which we have been ſpeaking are with the genius of religion? If for this purpoſe he were to ſelect the place, and frequent the amuſements to which Democrats and Jacobins *(a)* ſhould love to reſort for entertainment, and in which they ſhould find themſelves ſo much at home, as invariably to ſelect the ſpot for their abiding habitation; where dialogue, and ſong, and the intelligible language of geſticulation, ſhould be uſed to convey ideas and ſentiments, not perhaps palpably treaſonable, or falling directly within the ſtrict preciſion of any legal limits, but yet palpably contrary to the ſpirit of monarchical government; which, further, the higheſt authorities had recommended as ſovereign ſpecifics for cooling the warmth, and enlarging the narrowneſs of an exceſſive loyalty!

(a) The author is almoſt afraid of uſing the terms, leſt they ſhould convey an impreſſion of party feelings, of which he wiſhes this book to exhibit no traces; but he here means by Democrats and Jacobins, not perſons on whom party violence faſtens the epithet, but perſons who are really and avowedly ſuch.

What

Digitized by Google

SECT. V.

What opinion ſhould we form of the delicacy of that friendſhip, or of the fidelity of that love, which, in relation to their reſpective objects, ſhould exhibit the ſame contradictions?

IN truth, the *hard meaſure*, if the phraſe may be pardoned, which we give to God; and the very different way in which we allow ourſelves to act, and ſpeak, and feel, where he is concerned, from that which we require, or even practiſe in the caſe of our fellow-creatures, is in itſelf the moſt deciſive proof that the principle of the love of God, if not altogether extinct in us, is at leaſt in the loweſt poſſible degree of languor.

Practical ſyſtem of nominal Chriſtians defective in what regards the love of their fellow-creatures.

FROM examining the degree in which the bulk of nominal Chriſtians are defective in the love of God, if we proceed to inquire concerning the ſtrength of their love towards their fellow-creatures, the writer is well aware of its being generally held, that here at leaſt they may rather challenge praiſe than ſubmit to cenſure. And the many beneficent inſtitutions in which this country abounds, probably above every other, whe-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ther in ancient or modern times, may be perhaps appealed to in proof of the opinion. Much of what might have been otherwiſe urged in the diſcuſſion of this topic, has been anticipated in the inquiry into the grounds of the extravagant eſtimation, aſſigned to amiable tempers and uſeful lives, when unconnected with religious principle. What was then ſtated may ſerve in many caſes to lower, in the preſent inſtance, the loftineſs of the pretenſions of theſe nominal Chriſtians; and we ſhall hereafter have occaſion to mention another conſideration, of which the effect muſt be, ſtill further to reduce their claims. Meanwhile, let it ſuffice to remark, that we muſt not reſt ſatisfied with merely ſuperficial appearances, if we would form a fair eſtimate of the degree of purity and vigour, in which the principle of good will towards men warms the boſoms of the generality of profeſſed Chriſtians in the higher and more opulent claſſes in this country. In a highly poliſhed ſtate of ſociety, for inſtance, we do not expect to find moroſeneſs; and in an age of great profuſion, though we may reflect with pleaſure on thoſe numerous charitable inſtitutions, which are juſtly the honour of Great-Britain; we are not too haſtily to

Digitized by Google

to infer a ſtrong principle of internal benevolence, from liberal contributions to the relief of indigence and miſery. When theſe contributions indeed are equally abundant in frugal times, or from individuals perſonally œconomical, the ſource from which they originate becomes leſs queſtionable. But a vigorous principle of philanthropy muſt not be at once conceded, on the ground of liberal benefactions to the poor, in the caſe of one who by his liberality in this reſpect is curtailed in no neceſſary, is abridged of no luxury, is put to no trouble either of thought or of action; who, not to impute a deſire of being praiſed for his benevolence, is injured in no man's eſtimation; in whom alſo familiarity with large ſums has produced that freedom in the expenditure of money, which it never fails to operate, except in minds under the influence of a ſtrong principle of avarice.

True marks of benevolence.

OUR concluſion, perhaps, would be leſs favourable, but not leſs fair, if we were to try the characters in queſtion by thoſe ſurer teſts, which are ſtated by the Apoſtle to be leſs ambiguous marks of a real ſpirit of philanthropy. The ſtrength of every paſſion is to be eſtimated by its victory over paſſions of an oppoſite nature. What judgement then

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

ſhall we form of the force of the benevolence of the age, when meaſured by this ſtandard? How does it ſtand the ſhock, when it comes into encounter with our pride, our vanity, our ſelf-love, our ſelf-intereſt, our love of eaſe or of pleaſure, with our ambition, with our deſire of worldly eſtimation? Does it make us ſelf-denying, that we may be liberal in relieving others? Does it make us perſevere in doing good in ſpite of ingratitude; and only pity the ignorance, or prejudice, or malice, which miſrepreſents our conduct, or miſconſtrues our motives? Does it make us forbear from what we conceive may probably prove the occaſion of harm to a fellow-creature; though the harm ſhould not ſeem naturally or even fairly to flow from our conduct, but to be the reſult only of his own obſtinacy or weakneſs? Are we ſlow to believe any thing to our neighbour's diſadvantage? and when we cannot but credit it, are we diſpoſed rather to cover, and as far as we juſtly can, to palliate, than to divulge or aggravate it? Suppoſe an opportunity to occur of performing a kindneſs, to one who from pride or vanity ſhould be loth to receive, or to be known to receive, a favour from us; ſhould we honeſtly endeavour, ſo far as we could with truth, to leſſen in his

Digitized by Google

own mind and in that of others the merit of our good offices, and by ſo doing diſpoſe him to receive them with diminiſhed reluctance, and a leſs painful weight of obligation? This end, however, muſt be accompliſhed, if to be accompliſhed at all, by a ſimple and fair explanation of the circumſtances, which may render the action in no wiſe inconvenient to ourſelves, though highly beneficial to another; not by ſpeeches of affected diſparagement, which we might eaſily foreſee, and in fact do foreſee, muſt produce the contrary effect. Can we, from motives of kindneſs, incur or riſk the charge of being deficient in ſpirit, in penetration, or in foreſight? Do we tell another of his faults, when the communication, though probably beneficial to *him*, cannot be made without embarraſſment or pain to ourſelves, and may probably leſſen his regard for our perſon, or his opinion of our judgement? Can we ſtifle a repartee which would wound another; though the utterance of it would gratify our vanity, and the ſuppreſſion of it may diſparage our character for wit? If any one advance a miſtaken propoſition, in an inſtance wherein the error may be miſchievous to him; can we, to the prejudice perhaps of our credit for diſcernment, forbear to con- SECT. V.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

tradict him in public, if it be probable that in so doing, by piquing his pride we might only harden him in his error? and can we reserve our counsel for some more favourable season, the "mollia tempora fandi," when it may be communicated without offence? If we have recommended to any one a particular line of conduct, or have pointed out the probable mischiefs of the opposite course, and if our admonitions have been neglected, are we *really hurt* when our predictions of evil are accomplished? Is our love superior to envy, and jealousy, and emulation? Are we acute to discern and forward to embrace any fair opportunity of promoting the interests of another; if it be in a line wherein we ourselves also are moving, and in which we think our progress has not been proportioned to our desert? Can we take pleasure in bringing his merits into notice, and in obviating the prejudices which may have damped his efforts, or in removing the obstacles which may have retarded his advancement? If even to this extent we should be able to stand the scrutiny, let it be farther asked how, in the case of our enemies, do we correspond with the Scripture representations of love? Are we meek under provocations,

Digitized by Google

vocations, ready to forgive, and apt to forget injuries? Can we, with ſincerity, "bleſs "them that curſe us, do good to them that "hate us, and pray for them which deſpite-"fully uſe us, and perſecute us?" Do we prove to the Searcher of hearts a real ſpirit of forgiveneſs, by our forbearing not only from avenging an injury when it is in our power, but even from telling to any one how ill we have been uſed; and that too when we are not kept ſilent by a conſciouſneſs that we ſhould loſe credit by divulging the circumſtance? And laſtly, Can we not only be content to return our enemies good for evil, (for this return, as has been remarked by one of the greateſt of uninſpired authorities, *(a)* may be prompted by pride and repaid by ſelf-complacency) but, when they are ſucceſsful or unſucceſsful without our having contributed to their good or ill fortune, can we not only be content, but cordially rejoice in their proſperity, or ſympathize with their diſtreſſes?

SECT. V.

THESE are but a few ſpecimens of the characteriſtic marks which might be ſtated, of a true predominant benevolence; yet even

(a) LORD BACON,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

theſe may ſerve to convince us how far the bulk of nominal Chriſtians fall ſhort of the requiſitions of Scripture, even in that particular, which exhibits their character in the moſt favourable point of view. The truth is, we do not enough call to mind the exalted tone of Scripture morality; and are therefore apt to value ourſelves on the heights to which we attain, when a better acquaintance with our ſtandard would have convinced us of our falling far ſhort of the elevation preſcribed to us. It is in the very inſtance of the moſt difficult of the duties lately ſpecified, the forgiveneſs and love of enemies, that our Saviour points out to our imitation the example of our Supreme Benefactor. After ſtating that, by being kind and courteous to thoſe who, even in the world's opinion, had a title to our good offices and good will, we ſhould in vain ſet up a claim to *Chriſtian* benevolence, he emphatically adds, "Be ye therefore perfect, even "as your Father which is in heaven is "perfect."

The Stage.

WE muſt here again reſort to a topic which was lately touched on, that of theatrical amuſements; and recommend it to their

Digitized by Google

their advocates to consider them in connection with the duty, of which we have now been exhibiting some of the leading characters. SECT. V.

It is an undeniable fact, for the truth of which we may safely appeal to every age and nation, that the situation of the performers, particularly of those of the female sex, is remarkably unfavourable to the maintenance and growth of the religious and moral principle, and of course highly dangerous to their eternal interests. Might it not then be fairly asked, how far, in all who confess the truth of this position, it is consistent with the sensibility of Christian benevolence, merely for the entertainment of an idle hour, to encourage the continuance of any of their fellow-creatures in such a way of life, and to take a part in tempting any others to enter into it; how far, considering that, by their own concession, they are employing whatever they spend in this way, in sustaining and advancing the cause of vice, and consequently in promoting misery; they are herein bestowing this share of their wealth in a manner agreeable to the intentions of their holy and benevolent Benefactor? how far also they are not in this instance the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

the rather criminal, from there being ſo many ſources of innocent pleaſure open to their enjoyment? how far they are acting conformably to that golden principle of doing to others as we would they ſhould do to us? how far they harmonize with the ſpirit of the Apoſtle's affectionate declaration, that he would deny himſelf for his whole life the moſt innocent indulgence, nay, what might ſeem almoſt an abſolute neceſſary, rather than cauſe his weak fellow Chriſtian to offend? or laſtly, how far they are influenced by the ſolemn language of our Saviour himſelf; "It "muſt needs be that offences come, but woe "to that man by whom the offence cometh; "it were better for him that a mill-ſtone "were hanged about his neck, and that he "were caſt into the depths of the ſea?" The preſent inſtance is perhaps another example of our taking greater concern in the temporal, than in the ſpiritual intereſts of our fellow-creatures. That man would be deemed, and juſtly deemed, of an inhuman temper, who in theſe days were to ſeek his amuſement in the combats of gladiators and prize fighters: yet *Chriſtians* appear conſcious of no inconſiſtency, in finding their pleaſure in ſpectacles maintained at the riſk at leaſt, if not the ruin, of the eternal

Digitized by Google

eternal happineſs of thoſe who perform in them! SECT. V.

SECT. VI.

Grand defect.—Neglect of the peculiar Doctrines of Chriſtianity.

BUT the grand radical defect in the practical ſyſtem of theſe nominal Chriſtians, is their forgetfulneſs of all the peculiar doctrines of the Religion which they profeſs—the corruption of human nature—the atonement of the Saviour—and the ſanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

HERE then we come again to the grand diſtinction, between the Religion of Chriſt and that of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians in the preſent day. The point is of the utmoſt *practical importance*, and we would therefore trace it into its actual effects.

THERE are, it is to be apprehended, not a few, who having been for ſome time hurried down the ſtream of diſſipation in the indulgence of all their natural appetites, (except, perhaps, that they were reſtrained from very groſs vice by a regard to character, or by the yet

This evil purſued into its effects.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

yet unſubdued voice of conſcience); and who, having all the while thought little, or ſcarcely at all, about Religion, "living," to uſe the emphatical language of Scripture, "without "God in the world," become in ſome degree impreſſed with a ſenſe of the infinite importance of Religion. A fit of ſickneſs, perhaps, or the loſs of ſome friend or much loved relative, or ſome other ſtroke of adverſe fortune, damps their ſpirits, awakens them to a practical conviction of the precariouſneſs of all human things, and turns them to ſeek for ſome more ſtable foundation of happineſs than this world can afford. Looking into themſelves ever ſo little, they become ſenſible that they muſt have offended God. They reſolve accordingly to ſet about the work of reformation.—Here it is that we ſhall recognize the fatal effects of the prevailing ignorance of the real nature of Chriſtianity, and the general forgetfulneſs of its grand peculiarities. Theſe men *wiſh* to reform, but they know neither the real *nature* of their diſtemper nor its true remedy. They are aware indeed, that they muſt "ceaſe to do evil, "and learn to do well;" that they muſt relinquiſh their habits of vice, and attend more or leſs to the duties of Religion: but having no conception of the actual malignity of the diſ-

eaſe

Digitized by Google

eaſe under which they labour, or of the perfect cure which the Goſpel has provided for it, or of the manner in which that cure is to be effected,

"They do but ſkim and film the ulcerous place,
"While rank corruption, mining all within,
"Infects unſeen."

It often happens therefore but too naturally in this caſe, that where they do not ſoon deſiſt from their attempt at reformation, and relapſe into their old habits of ſin; they take up with a partial and ſcanty amendment, and fondly flatter themſelves that it is a thorough change. They now conceive that they have a right to take to themſelves the comforts of Chriſtianity. Not being able to raiſe their practice up to their ſtandard of right, they lower their ſtandard to their practice: they ſit down for life contented with their preſent attainments, beguiled by the complacencies of their own minds, and by the favourable teſtimony of ſurrounding friends; and it often happens, particularly where there is any degree of ſtrictneſs in formal and ceremonial obſervances, that there are no people more jealous of their character for Religion.

OTHERS

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

OTHERS perhaps go farther than this. The dread of the wrath to come has ſunk deeper into their hearts; and for a while they ſtrive with all their might to reſiſt their evil propenſities, and to walk without ſtumbling in the path of duty. Again and again they reſolve: again and again they break their reſolutions *(a)*. All their endeavours are foiled, and they become more and more convinced of their own moral weakneſs, and of the ſtrength of their inherent corruption. Thus groaning under the enſlaving power of ſin, and experiencing the futility of the utmoſt efforts which they can uſe for effecting their deliverance, they are tempted (ſometimes it is to be feared they yield to the temptation) to give up all in deſpair, and to acquieſce under

(a) If any one would read a deſcription of this proceſs, enlivened and enforced by the powers of the moſt exquiſite poetry, let him peruſe the middle and latter part of the fifth Book of COWPER's Taſk. My warm attachment to the beautifully natural compoſitions of this truly Chriſtian poet may perhaps bias my judgement; but the part of the work to which I refer appears to me ſcarcely ſurpaſſed by any thing in our language. The honourable epithet of *Chriſtian* may juſtly be aſſigned to a poet, whoſe writings, while they faſcinate the reader by their manifeſtly coming from the heart, breathe throughout, the ſpirit of that character of Chriſtianity, with which ſhe was announced to the world; "Glory to God, peace on earth, good will towards "men."

their

Digitized by Google

SECT. VI.

their wretched captivity, conceiving it impoſſible to break their chains. Sometimes, probably, it even happens that they are driven to ſeek for refuge from their diſquietude in the ſuggeſtions of infidelity; and to quiet their troubleſome conſciences by arguments which they themſelves ſcarcely believe, at the very moment in which they ſuffer themſelves to be lulled aſleep by them. In the mean time while this conflict has been going on, their walk is ſad and comfortleſs, and their couch is nightly watered with tears. Theſe men are purſuing the right object, but they miſtake the way in which it is to be obtained. *The path in which they are now treading is not that which the Goſpel has provided for conducting them to true holineſs, nor will they find in it any ſolid peace.*

Advice of modern Religioniſts to ſuch as are deſirous of repenting.

PERSONS under theſe circumſtances naturally ſeek for religious inſtruction. They turn over the works of our modern Religioniſts, and as well as they can collect the advice addreſſed to men in their ſituation: the ſubſtance of it is, at the beſt, of this ſort; "Be ſorry indeed for your ſins, and diſcon-"tinue the practice of them, but do not "make yourſelves ſo uneaſy. Chriſt died "for the ſins of the whole world. Do your "utmoſt;

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

" utmoſt; diſcharge with fidelity the duties of " your ſtations, not neglecting your religious " offices; and fear not but that in the end " all will go well; and that having thus per- " formed the conditions required on your " part, you will at laſt obtain forgiveneſs of " our merciful Creator through the merits of " Jeſus Chriſt, and be aided, where your own " ſtrength ſhall be inſufficient, by the aſſiſt- " ance of his Holy Spirit. Meanwhile you " cannot do better than read carefully ſuch " books of practical divinity, as will inſtruct " you in the principles of a Chriſtian life. " We are excellently furniſhed with works of " this nature; and it is by the diligent ſtudy " of them that you will gradually become a " proficient in the leſſons of the Goſpel."

Advice given to the ſame perſons by the holy Scriptures.

BUT the holy Scriptures, and with them the Church of England, call upon thoſe who are in the circumſtances above-ſtated, to *lay afreſh the whole foundation of their Religion.* In concurrence with the Scripture, that Church calls upon them, in the firſt place, gratefully to adore that undeſerved goodneſs which has awakened them from the ſleep of death; to proſtrate themſelves before the Croſs of Chriſt with humble penitence and deep ſelf-abhorrence; ſolemnly reſolving to forſake all their ſins,

Digitized by Google

ſins, but relying on the Grace of God alone for power to keep their reſolution. Thus, and thus only, ſhe aſſures them that all their crimes will be blotted out, and that they will receive from above a new living principle of holineſs. She produces from the Word of God the ground and warrant of her counſel; "Believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and thou "ſhalt be ſaved."—"No man," ſays our bleſſed Saviour, "cometh unto the Father but by "me."—"I am the true Vine. As the "branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf except it "abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye "abide in me."—"He that abideth in me "and I in him, the ſame bringeth forth much "fruit; for without" (or ſevered from) "me "ye can do nothing."—"By grace ye are "ſaved through faith, and that not of your-"ſelves, it is the gift of God; not of works, "leſt any man ſhould boaſt: for we are his "workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto "good works."

SECT. VI.

Extreme importance of the point now under diſcuſſion.

LET me not be thought tedious, or be accuſed of running into needleſs repetitions, in preſſing this point with ſo much earneſtneſs. It is in fact a point which can never be too much inſiſted on. It is the cardinal point on which the whole of Chriſtianity turns; on

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

which it is peculiarly proper in this place to be perfectly distinct. There have been some who have imagined that the wrath of God was to be deprecated, or his favour conciliated, by austerities and penances, or even by forms and ceremonies, and external observances. But all men of enlightened understandings, who acknowledge the moral government of God, must also acknowledge, that vice must offend and virtue delight him. In short they must, more or less, assent to the Scripture declaration, "without holiness no man shall "see the Lord." But the grand distinction, which subsists between the true Christian and all other Religionists, (the class of persons in particular whom it is my object to address) is concerning the *nature* of this holiness, and the *way in which it is to be obtained.* The views entertained by the latter, of the *nature* of holiness, are of all degrees of inadequateness; and they conceive it is to be *obtained* by their own natural unassisted efforts: or if they admit some vague indistinct notion of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it is unquestionably obvious, on conversing with them, that this does not constitute the *main practical* ground of their dependence. *But the nature of the holiness, to which the desires of the true Christian are directed, is no other than the restoration*

Digitized by Google

ration of the image of God: and as to the manner of acquiring it, disclaiming with indignation every idea of attaining it by his own strength, all his hopes of possessing it rest altogether on the Divine assurances of the operation of the Holy Spirit, in those who cordially embrace the Gospel of Christ. He knows therefore that this holiness is not to PRECEDE *his reconciliation to God, and be its* CAUSE; *but to follow it, and be its* EFFECT. *That in short it is by* FAITH IN CHRIST *only (a) that he is to be justified in the sight of God; to be delivered from the condition of a child of wrath, and a slave of Satan; to be adopted into the family of God; to become an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, entitled to all the privileges which belong to this high relation; here, to the Spirit of Grace, and a partial renewal after the image of his Creator; hereafter, to the more perfect possession of the Divine likeness, and an inheritance of eternal glory.*

The true Christian's practical use of the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity.

AND as it is in this way, that, in obedience to the dictates of the Gospel, the true Christian must originally become possessed of the vital spirit and living principle of universal holiness; so, in order to grow in grace, he

(a) Here again let it be remarked, that faith, where genuine, always supposes repentance, abhorrence of sin, &c.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

must also study in the same school; finding in the consideration of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, and in the contemplation of the life, and character, and sufferings of our blessed Saviour, the elements of all practical wisdom, and an inexhaustible storehouse of instructions and motives, no otherwise to be so well supplied. From the neglect of these peculiar doctrines arise the main practical errors of the bulk of professed Christians. These gigantic truths, retained in view, would put to shame the littleness of their dwarfish morality. It would be impossible for them to make these harmonize with their inadequate conceptions of the wretchedness and danger of our natural state, which is represented in Scripture as having so powerfully called forth the compassion of God, that he sent his only begotten son to rescue us. Where *now* are their low views of the worth of the soul, when means like these were taken to redeem it? Where *now* their inadequate conceptions of the guilt of sin, for which in the divine counsels it seemed requisite that an atonement no less costly should be made, than that of the blood of the only begotten Son of God? How can they reconcile their low standard of Christian practice with the representation of our being "temples of the Holy "Ghost?"

Digitized by Google

" Ghoſt?" Their cold ſenſe of obligation, and ſcanty grudged returns of ſervice, with the glowing gratitude of thoſe who, having been " delivered from the power of darkneſs, and " tranſlated into the kingdom of God's dear " Son," may well conceive that the labours of a whole life will be but an imperfect expreſſion of their thankfulneſs. SECT. VI.

THE peculiar doctrines of the Goſpel being once admitted, the concluſions which have been now ſuggeſted are clear and obvious deductions of reaſon. But our neglect of theſe important truths is ſtill leſs pardonable, becauſe they are diſtinctly and repeatedly applied in Scripture to the very purpoſes in queſtion, and the whole ſuperſtructure of Chriſtian morals is grounded on their deep and ample baſis. Sometimes theſe truths are repreſented in Scripture, *generally*, as furniſhing Chriſtians with a vigorous and ever preſent principle of univerſal obedience. And our ſlowneſs in learning the leſſons of heavenly wiſdom is ſtill further ſtimulated, by almoſt every particular Chriſtian duty being occaſionally traced to them as to its proper ſource. They are every where repreſented as warming the hearts of the people of God on earth with continual admiration, and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

thankfulneſs, and love, and joy; as triumphing over the attack of the laſt great enemy, and as calling forth afreſh in Heaven the ardent effuſions of their unexhauſted gratitude.

IF then we would indeed be "filled with "wiſdom and ſpiritual underſtanding;" if we would "walk worthy of the Lord unto all "well pleaſing, being fruitful in every good "work, and increaſing in the knowledge of "God;" here let us fix our eyes! Laying "aſide every weight, and the ſin that does "ſo eaſily beſet us; let us run with patience "the race that is ſet before us, LOOKING "UNTO JESUS, the Author and Finiſher of "our faith, who for the joy that was ſet be-"fore him endured the croſs, deſpiſing the "ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of "the throne of God *."

Uſe of the peculiar Doctrines in enforcing the importance of Chriſtianity.

HERE beſt we may learn the infinite *importance* of Chriſtianity. How little it can deſerve to be treated in that ſlight and ſuperficial way, in which it is in theſe days regarded by the bulk of nominal Chriſtians, who are apt to think it may be enough, and almoſt equally pleaſing to God, to be religi-

* Heb. xii. 1, 2.

ous

ous *in any way*, and upon *any* ſyſtem. What exquiſite folly it muſt be to riſk the ſoul on ſuch a venture, in direct contradiction to the dictates of reaſon, and the expreſs declaration of the word of God! "How ſhall we eſcape, "if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?"

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In enforcing the duty of an unconditional ſurrender of ourſelves to God.

HERE we ſhall beſt learn the duty and reaſonableneſs of an abſolute and unconditional ſurrender of ſoul and body to the will and ſervice of God.—"We are not our own; for "we are bought with a price," and muſt therefore make it our grand concern to "glorify God with our bodies and our ſpirits, "which are God's." Should we be baſe enough, even if we could do it with ſafety, to make any reſerves in our returns of ſervice to that gracious Saviour, who "gave up *himſelf* for us?" If we have formerly talked of compounding by the performance of ſome commands for the breach of others; can we now bear the mention of a *compoſition* of duties, or of retaining to ourſelves the right of practiſing *little* ſins! The very ſuggeſtion of ſuch an idea fills us with indignation and ſhame, if our hearts be not dead to every ſenſe of gratitude.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

In enforcing the guilt of sin and the dread of its punishment.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

HERE we find displayed, in the most lively colours, the guilt of sin, and how hateful it must be to the perfect holiness of that Being, who is of "purer eyes than to behold iniquity." When we see that, rather than sin should go unpunished, "God spared not his "own Son," but "was *pleased* to bruise "him and put him to grief" for our sakes; how vainly must impenitent sinners flatter themselves with the hope of escaping the vengeance of Heaven, and buoy themselves up with I know not what desperate dreams of the Divine benignity!

HERE too we may anticipate the dreadful sufferings of that state, "where shall be weep-"ing and gnashing of teeth;" when rather than that we should undergo them, "the Son of "God" himself, who "thought it no rob-"bery to be equal with God," consented to take upon him our degraded nature with all its weaknesses and infirmities; to be "a "man of sorrows," "to hide not his face "from shame and spitting," "to be wounded "for our transgressions, and bruised for our "iniquities," and at length to endure the sharpness of death, "even the death of the "Cross,"

Digitized by Google

" Croſs," that he might deliver us from the " wrath to come," and open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. SECT. VI.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In promoting the love of God.

HERE beſt ye may learn to grow in the love of God! The certainty of his pity and love towards repenting ſinners, thus irrefragably demonſtrated, chaſes away the ſenſe of tormenting fear, and beſt lays the ground in us of reciprocal affection. And while we ſteadily contemplate this wonderful tranſaction, and conſider in its ſeveral relations the amazing truth, " that God ſpared not his " own Son, but delivered him up for us all;" if our minds be not utterly dead to every impulſe of ſenſibility, the emotions of admiration, of preference, of hope, and truſt, and joy, cannot but ſpring up within us, chaſtened with reverential fear, and ſoftened and quickened by overflowing gratitude *(a)*. *Here* we ſhall become animated by an abiding diſpoſition to endeavour to pleaſe our great Benefactor; and by a humble perſuaſion, that the weakeſt endeavours of this nature will not be deſpiſed by a Being, who

(a) Vide Chap. iii. Where theſe were ſhewn to be the elementary principles of the paſſion of love.

has

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

has already proved himself so kindly affected towards us *. *Here* we cannot fail to imbibe an earnest desire of possessing his favour, and a conviction, founded on his own declarations thus unquestionably confirmed, that the desire shall not be disappointed. Whenever we are conscious that we have offended this gracious Being, a single thought of the great work of Redemption will be enough to fill us with compunction. We shall feel a deep concern, grief mingled with indignant shame, for having conducted ourselves so unworthily towards one who to us has been infinite in kindness: we shall not rest till we have reason to hope that he is reconciled to us; and we shall watch over our hearts and conduct in future with a renewed jealousy, lest we should again offend him. To those who are ever so little acquainted with the nature of the human mind, it were superfluous to remark, that the affections and tempers which have been enumerated, are the infallible marks of the constituent properties of love. Let *him* then who would abound and grow in this Christian principle, be much conversant with the great doctrines of the Gospel.

* Rom. v. 9, 10.

Digitized by Google

SECT. VI.

In promoting the love of Chriſt.

IT is obvious, that the attentive and frequent conſideration of theſe great doctrines, muſt have a ſtill more direct tendency to produce and cheriſh in our minds the principle of the love of Chriſt. But on this head, ſo much was ſaid in a former chapter, as to render any farther obſervations unneceſſary.

In promoting the love of our fellow-creatures.

MUCH alſo has been already obſerved concerning the love of our fellow-creatures, and it has been diſtinctly ſtated to be the indiſpenſable, and indeed the characteriſtic duty of Chriſtians. It remains, however, to be here farther remarked, that this grace can no where be cultivated with more advantage than at the foot of the Croſs. No where can our Saviour's dying injunction to the exerciſe of this virtue be recollected with more effect; "This is my commandment, that "ye love one another as I have loved you." No where can the admonition of the Apoſtle more powerfully affect us; "Be ye kind one "to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one "another, even as God, for Chriſt's ſake, "hath forgiven you." The view of mankind which is here preſented to us, as having been all involved in one common ruin; and the offer of deliverance held out to all,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

by the Son of God's giving of himſelf up to pay the price of our reconciliation, produce that ſympathy towards our fellow-creatures, which, by the conſtitution of our nature, ſeldom fails to reſult from the conſciouſneſs of an identity of intereſts and a ſimilarity of fortunes. Pity for an unthinking world aſſiſts this impreſſion. Our enmities ſoften and melt away: we are aſhamed of thinking much of the *petty injuries* which we may have ſuffered, when we conſider what the Son of God, "who did no wrong, neither was "guile found in his mouth," patiently underwent. Our hearts become tender while we contemplate this ſignal act of loving-kindneſs. We grow deſirous of imitating what we cannot but admire. A vigorous principle of enlarged and active charity ſprings up within us; and we go forth with alacrity, deſirous of treading in the ſteps of our bleſſed Maſter, and of manifeſting our gratitude for his unmerited goodneſs, by bearing each others burthens, and abounding in the diſintereſted labours of benevolence.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In promoting humility,

HE was meek and lowly of heart, and from the ſtudy of *his* character we ſhall beſt learn

Digitized by Google

SECT. VI.

learn the leſſons of humility. Contemplating the work of Redemption, we become more and more impreſſed with the ſenſe of our natural darkneſs, and helpleſſneſs, and miſery, from which it was requiſite to ranſom us at ſuch a price; more and more conſcious that we are utterly unworthy of all the amazing condeſcenſion and love which have been manifeſted towards us; aſhamed of the callouſneſs of our tendereſt ſenſibility, and of the poor returns of our moſt active ſervices. Conſiderations like theſe, abating our pride and reducing our opinions of *ourſelves*, naturally moderate our pretenſions towards *others*. We become leſs diſpoſed to exact that reſpect for our perſons, and that deference for our authority, which we naturally covet; we leſs ſenſibly feel a ſlight, and leſs hotly reſent it; we grow leſs irritable, leſs prone to be diſſatisfied; more ſoft, and meek, and courteous, and placable, and condeſcending. We are not literally required to practiſe the ſame humiliating ſubmiſſions, to which our bleſſed Saviour himſelf was not aſhamed to ſtoop *; but the *ſpirit* of the remark applies to us, "the ſervant is not greater

* John xiii. 13—17. If I then, your Lord and Maſter, have waſhed your feet; ye alſo ought to waſh one another's feet, &c.

"than

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"than his Lord:" and we ſhould eſpecially bear this truth in mind, when the occaſion calls upon us to diſcharge ſome duty, or patiently to ſuffer ſome ill treatment, whereby our pride will be wounded, and we are likely to be in ſome degree degraded from the rank we had poſſeſſed in the world's eſtimation. At the ſame time the Sacred Scriptures aſſuring us, that to the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit, purchaſed for us by the death of Chriſt, we muſt be indebted for the ſucceſs of all our endeavours after improvement in virtue; the conviction of this truth tends to render us diffident of our own powers, and to ſuppreſs the firſt riſings of vanity. Thus, while we are conducted to heights of virtue no otherwiſe attainable, due care is taken to prevent our becoming giddy from our elevation *(a)*. It is the Scripture characteriſtic of the Goſpel ſyſtem, that by it all diſpoſition to exalt ourſelves is excluded; and if we really grow in grace, we ſhall grow alſo in humility.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In promoting a ſpirit of moderation in earthly purſuits, and cheerfulneſs in ſuffering.

"HE endured the croſs, deſpiſing the "ſhame."—While we ſteadily contemplate

(a) Vide Paſcal's Thoughts on Religion — A book abounding in the deepeſt views of practical Chriſtianity.

this

Digitized by Google

this ſolemn ſcene, that ſober frame of ſpirit is produced within us, which beſt befits the Chriſtian militant here on earth. We become impreſſed with a ſenſe of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of time, and that it behoves us to be diligent in making proviſion for eternity. In ſuch a temper of mind, the pomps and vanities of life are caſt behind us as the baubles of children.—We loſe our reliſh for the frolics of gaiety, the race of ambition, or the groſſer gratifications of voluptuouſneſs. In the caſe even of thoſe objects, which may more juſtly claim the attention of reaſonable and immortal beings; in our family arrangements, in our plans of life, in our ſchemes of buſineſs, we become, without relinquiſhing the path of duty, more moderate in purſuit, and more indifferent about the iſſue. Here alſo we learn to correct the world's falſe eſtimate of things, and to "look through the ſhallowneſs of earthly "grandeur;" to venerate what is truly excellent and noble, though under a deſpiſed and degraded form; and to cultivate within ourſelves that true magnanimity, which can make us riſe ſuperior to the ſmiles or frowns of this world; that dignified compoſure of ſoul which no earthly incidents can deſtroy or ruffle. Inſtead of repining

SECT. VI.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

pining at any of the little occaſional inconveniences we may meet with in our paſſage through life; we are almoſt aſhamed of the multiplied comforts and enjoyments of our condition, when we think of him, who, though "the Lord of glory," "had not "where to lay his head." And if it be our lot to undergo evils of more than ordinary magnitude, we are animated under them by reflecting, that we are hereby more conformed to the example of our bleſſed Maſter: though we muſt ever recollect one important difference, that the ſufferings of Chriſt were voluntarily borne for *our* benefit, and were probably far more exquiſitely agonizing than any which we are called upon to undergo. Beſides, it muſt be a ſolid ſupport to us amidſt all our troubles to know, that they do not happen to us by chance; that they are not even merely the puniſhment of ſin; but that they are the diſpenſations of a kind Providence, and ſent on meſſages of mercy.—"The cup that our Father hath "given us, ſhall we not drink it?"—"Bleſſed "Saviour! by the bitterneſs of thy pains we "may eſtimate the force of thy love; we "are *ſure* of thy kindneſs and compaſſion; "thou wouldſt not willingly call on us to "ſuffer; thou haſt declared unto us, that all "things ſhall finally work together for good "to

Digitized by Google

"to them that love thee; and therefore, if "thou ſo ordaineſt it, welcome diſappoint- "ment and poverty, welcome ſickneſs and "pain, welcome even ſhame, and contempt, "and calumny. If this be a rough and thorny "path, it is one in which thou haſt gone "before us. Where we ſee thy footſteps we "cannot repine. Meanwhile, thou wilt "ſupport us with the conſolations of thy "grace; and even here thou canſt more "than compenſate to us for any temporal "ſufferings, by the poſſeſſion of that peace, "which the world can neither give nor take "away."

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In promoting courage and confidence in dangers, and heavenly mindedneſs.

"THE Author and Finiſher of our faith, "who for the joy that was ſet before him "endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and "is ſet down at the right hand of God." From the ſcene of our Saviour's weakneſs and degradation, we follow him, in idea, into the realms of glory, where "he is on the "right hand of God; angels, and principa- "lities, and powers being made ſubject unto "him."—But though changed in place, yet not in nature, he is ſtill full of ſympathy and love; and having died "to ſave his peo-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

" ple from their ſins," " he ever *liveth* to make " interceſſion for them." Cheered by this animating view, the Chriſtian's fainting ſpirits revive. Under the heavieſt burthens he feels his ſtrength recruited; and when all around him is dark and ſtormy, he can lift up an eye to Heaven, radiant with hope, and gliſtening with gratitude. At ſuch a ſeaſon, no dangers can alarm, no oppoſition can move, no provocations can irritate. He may almoſt adopt, as the language of his ſober exultation, what in the philoſopher was but an idle rant; and, conſidering that it is only the garment of mortality which is ſubject to the rents of fortune; while his ſpirit, cheered with the divine ſupport, keeps its place within, ſecure and unaſſailable, he can ſometimes almoſt triumph at the ſtake, or on the ſcaffold, and cry out amidſt the ſevereſt buffets of adverſity, " Thou beateſt but the caſe of " Anaxarchus." But it is rarely that the Chriſtian is elevated with this " joy unſpeak- " able and full of glory:" he even lends himſelf to thoſe views with moderation and reſerve. Often, alas! emotions of another kind fill him with grief and confuſion: and conſcious of having acted unworthy of his high calling, perhaps of having expoſed himſelf to the juſt cenſure of a world ready enough

enough to ſpy out his infirmities, he ſeems to himſelf almoſt "to have crucified the Son "of God afreſh, and put him to an open "ſhame." But let neither his joys intoxicate, nor his ſorrows too much depreſs him. Let him ſtill remember that his *chief* buſineſs while on earth is not to meditate, but to act; that the ſeeds of moral corruption are apt to ſpring up within him, and that it is requiſite for him to watch over his own heart with inceſſant care; that he is to diſcharge with fidelity the duties of his particular ſtation, and to conduct himſelf, according to his meaſure, after the example of his bleſſed Maſter, whoſe meat and drink it was to do the work of his heavenly Father; that he is diligently to cultivate the talents with which God has entruſted him, and aſſiduouſly to employ them in doing juſtice and ſhewing mercy, while he guards againſt the aſſaults of any internal enemy. In ſhort, he is to demean himſelf, in all the common affairs of life, like an *accountable* creature, who, in correſpondence with the Scripture character of Chriſtians, is "waiting for the coming "of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt." Often therefore he queſtions himſelf, "Am I employ-"ing my time, my fortune, my bodily and "mental powers, ſo as to be able to 'render

SECT. VI.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

"up my account with joy, and not with "grief?' Am I 'adorning the doctrine of "God my Saviour in all things;' and prov- "ing that the ſervants of Chriſt, animated "by a principle of filial affection, which "renders their work a ſervice of perfect "freedom, are capable of as active and as "perſevering exertions, as the votaries of "fame, or the ſlaves of ambition, or the "drudges of avarice?"

THUS, without interruption to his labours, he may interpoſe occaſional thoughts of things unſeen; and amidſt the many little intervals of buſineſs, may calmly look upwards to the heavenly Advocate, who is ever pleading the cauſe of his people, and obtaining for them needful ſupplies of grace and conſolation. It is theſe realizing views, which give the Chriſtian a reliſh for the worſhip and ſervice of the heavenly world. And if theſe bleſſed images, "ſeen but through a "glaſs darkly," can thus refreſh the ſoul: what muſt be its ſtate, when on the morning of the reſurrection it ſhall awake to the unclouded viſion of celeſtial glory! when, "to "them that look for him, the Son of God "ſhall appear a ſecond time without ſin unto "ſalvation!" when "ſighing and ſorrow be-

"ing

Digitized by Google

" ing fled away ;" when doubts and fears no more diſquieting, and the painful conſciouſneſs of remaining imperfections no longer weighing down the ſpirit, they ſhall enter upon the fruition of " thoſe joys, which eye " hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither has it " entered into the heart of man to conceive ;" and ſhall bear their part in that bleſſed anthem—" Salvation to our God which ſitteth " upon the throne, and unto the Lamb," for ever and ever! SECT. VI.

THUS, never let it be forgotten, the main diſtinction between real Chriſtianity, and the ſyſtem of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians, chiefly conſiſts in the different place which is aſſigned in the two ſchemes to the peculiar doctrines of the Goſpel. Theſe, in the ſcheme of nominal Chriſtians, if admitted at all, appear but like the ſtars of the firmament to the ordinary eye. Thoſe ſplendid luminaries draw forth perhaps occaſionally a tranſient expreſſion of admiration, when we behold their beauty, or hear of their diſtances, magnitudes, or properties: now and then too we are led, perhaps, to muſe upon their poſſible uſes: but however curious as ſubjects of ſpeculation, after all, it muſt be confeſſed, they twinkle to the common obſerver with a vain

The place held by the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity conſtitutes the grand diſtinction between nominal and real Chriſtians.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

a vain and "idle" luſtre; and except in the dreams of the aſtrologer, have no influence on human happineſs, or any concern with the courſe and order of the world. But to the *real* Chriſtian, on the contrary, THESE *peculiar doctrines conſtitute the center to which he gravitates! the very ſun of his ſyſtem! the ſoul of the world! the origin of all that is excellent and lovely! the ſource of light, and life, and motion, and genial warmth, and plaſtic energy!* Dim is the light of reaſon, and cold and comfortleſs our ſtate, while left to her unaſſiſted guidance. Even the Old Teſtament itſelf, though a revelation from Heaven, ſhines but with feeble and ſcanty rays. But the bleſſed truths of the Goſpel are now unveiled to *our* eyes, and *we* are called upon to behold, and to enjoy "the light of the knowledge of "the glory of God, in the face of Jeſus "Chriſt," in the full radiance of its meridian ſplendor. The words of inſpiration beſt expreſs our highly favoured ſtate; "We all, "with open face beholding as in a glaſs the "glory of the Lord, are changed into the "ſame image, from glory to glory, even as "by the Spirit of the Lord."

Thou art the ſource and center of all minds,
Their only point of reſt, ETERNAL WORD;
From thee departing, they are loſt, and rove
At random, without honour, hope, or peace:

From

SECT. VI.

From thee is all that ſoothes the life of man;
His high endeavour, and his glad ſucceſs;
His ſtrength to ſuffer, and his will to ſerve.
But O! thou bounteous Giver of all good!
Thou art of all thy gifts thyſelf the crown:
Give what thou canſt, without thee we are poor,
And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

On the Excellence of Chriſtianity in certain important Particulars. Argument which reſults thence in Proof of its divine Origin.

CHAP. V.

THE writer of the preſent work, having now completed a faint delineation of the leading features of real Chriſtianity, may be permitted to ſuſpend for a few moments the farther execution of his plan, for the purpoſe of pointing out ſome excellencies which ſhe really poſſeſſes; but which, as they are not to be found in that ſuperficial ſyſtem which ſo unworthily uſurps her name, appear ſcarcely to have attracted ſufficient notice. If he ſhould ſeem to be deviating from the plan which he propoſed to himſelf, he would ſuggeſt as his excuſe; that the obſervations which he is about to offer will furniſh a ſtrong argument, in favour of the correctneſs of his preceding delineation of Chriſtianity, ſince ſhe will *now* appear to exhibit more clearly, than as ſhe is uſually drawn, the characters of her Divine original.

Digitized by Google

IT holds true, indeed, in the case of Christianity, as in that of all the works of God, that though a superficial and cursory view cannot fail to discover to us somewhat of their beauty; yet, when on a more careful and accurate scrutiny we become better acquainted with their properties, we become also more deeply impressed by a conviction of their excellence. We may begin by referring to the last chapter for an instance of the truth of this assertion. Therein was pointed out that intimate connection, that perfect harmony, between the leading doctrines and the practical precepts of Christianity, which is apt to escape the attention of the ordinary eye.

Consistency between the leading doctrines and practical precepts of Christianity.

IT may not be improper also to remark, though the position be so obvious as almost to render the statement of it needless, that there is the same close connection and perfect harmony in the leading doctrines of Christianity among each other. It is self-evident, that the corruption of human nature, that our reconciliation to God by the atonement of Christ, and that the restoration of our primitive dignity by the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, are all parts of one whole, united in close dependence and mutual congruity.

Between the leading doctrines of Christianity amongst each other.

PERHAPS,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. V.

Between the practical precepts amongſt each other.

PERHAPS, however, it has not been ſufficiently noticed, that in the chief practical precepts of Chriſtianity, there is the ſame eſſential agreement, the ſame mutual dependency of one upon another. Let us ſurvey this freſh inſtance of the wiſdom of that ſyſtem, which is the only ſolid foundation of our preſent or future happineſs.

THE virtues moſt ſtrongly and repeatedly enjoined in Scripture, and by our progreſs in which we may beſt meaſure our advancement in holineſs, are the fear and love of God and of Chriſt; love, kindneſs, and meekneſs towards our fellow-creatures; indifference to the poſſeſſions and events of this life, in compariſon with our concern about eternal things; ſelf-denial, and humility.

IT has been already pointed out in many particulars, how eſſentially ſuch of theſe Chriſtian graces as reſpect the Divine Being are connected with thoſe, which have more directly for their objects our fellow-creatures and ourſelves. But in the caſe of theſe two laſt deſcriptions of Chriſtian graces; the more attentively we conſider them with reference to the acknowledged principles of human nature, and to indiſputable facts, the more

Digitized by Google

more we ſhall be convinced that they afford mutual aid towards the acquiſition of each other; and that when acquired, they all harmonize with each other in perfect and eſſential union. This truth may perhaps be ſufficiently apparent from what has been already remarked; but it may not be uſeleſs to dwell on it a little more in detail. Take then the inſtances of loving-kindneſs and meekneſs towards others; and obſerve the ſolid foundation which is laid for them in ſelf-denial, in moderation as to the good things of this life, and in humility. The chief cauſes of enmity among men are, pride and ſelf-importance, the high opinion which men entertain of themſelves, and the conſequent deference which they exact from others; the over-valuation of worldly poſſeſſions and of worldly honours, and in conſequence, a too eager competition for them. The rough edges of one man rub againſt thoſe of another, if the expreſſion may be allowed; and the friction is often ſuch as to injure the works, and diſturb the juſt arrangements and regular motions of the ſocial machine. But by Chriſtianity all theſe roughneſſes are filed down: every wheel rolls round ſmoothly in the performance of its appointed function, and there is nothing to retard the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. V.

the ſeveral movements, or break in upon the general order. The religious ſyſtem indeed of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians is ſatisfied with ſome tolerable appearances of virtue: and accordingly, while it recommends love and beneficence, it tolerates pride and vanity in many caſes; it even countenances and commends the exceſſive valuation of character; and at leaſt allows a man's whole ſoul to be abſorbed in the purſuit of the object which he is following, be it what it may of perſonal or profeſſional ſucceſs. But though theſe latter qualities may, for the moſt part, fairly enough conſiſt with a ſoft exterior and courtly demeanour, they cannot ſo well accord with the genuine internal principle of love. Some cauſe of diſcontent, ſome ground of jealouſy or of envy will ariſe, ſome ſuſpicion will corrode, ſome diſappointment will ſour, ſome ſlight or calumny will irritate and provoke repriſals. In the higher walks of life, indeed, we learn to diſguiſe our emotions; but ſuch will be the real inward feelings of the ſoul, and they will frequently betray themſelves when we are off our guard, or when we are not likely to be diſparaged by the diſcovery. This ſtate of the higher orders, in which men are ſcuffling eagerly

Digitized by Google

eagerly for the ſame objects, and wearing all the while ſuch an appearance of ſweetneſs and complacency, has often appeared to me to be not ill illuſtrated by the image of a gaming table. There, every man is intent only on his own profit; the good ſucceſs of one is the ill ſucceſs of another, and therefore the general ſtate of mind of the parties engaged may be pretty well conjectured. All this, however, does not prevent, in well-bred ſocieties, an exterior of perfect gentleneſs and good humour. But let the ſame employment be carried on among the lower orders, who are not ſo well ſchooled in the art of diſguiſing their feelings; or in places where, by general connivance, people are allowed to give vent to their real emotions; and every paſſion will diſplay itſelf, by which the "human face divine" can be diſtorted and deformed. For thoſe who never have been preſent at ſo humiliating a ſcene, the pencil of Hogarth has provided a repreſentation of it, which is ſcarcely exaggerated; and the horrid name*, by which it is familiarly known among its frequenters, ſufficiently atteſts the fidelity of its reſemblance.

* The *Hell*, ſo called, let it be obſerved, not by way of reproach, but familiarity, by thoſe who frequent it.

BUT

CHAP. V.

BUT Chriſtianity is not ſatisfied with producing merely the ſpecious guiſe of virtue. She requires the ſubſtantial reality, which may ſtand the ſcrutinizing eye of that Being "who ſearches the heart." Meaning therefore that the Chriſtian ſhould live and breathe, in an atmoſphere, as it were, of benevolence, ſhe forbids whatever can tend to obſtruct its diffuſion, or vitiate its purity. It is on this principle that Emulation is forbidden: for, beſides that this paſſion almoſt inſenſibly degenerates into envy, and that it derives its origin chiefly from pride and a deſire of ſelf-exaltation; how can we eaſily love our neighbour as ourſelves, if we conſider him at the ſame time as our rival, and are intent upon ſurpaſſing him in the purſuit of whatever is the ſubject of our competition?

CHRISTIANITY, again, teaches us not to ſet our hearts on earthly poſſeſſions and earthly honours; and thereby provides for our really loving, or even cordially forgiving, thoſe who have been more ſucceſsful than ourſelves in the attainment of them, or who have even deſignedly thwarted us in the purſuit. "Let the rich," ſays the Apoſtle, "rejoice in that he is brought low." How can he who means to attempt, in any degree,

Digitized by Google

to obey this precept, be irreconcilably hoſtile towards any one who may have been inſtrumental in his depreſſion?

CHRISTIANITY alſo teaches us not to prize human eſtimation at a very high rate; and thereby provides for the practice of her injunction, to love from the heart thoſe who, juſtly or unjuſtly, may have attacked our reputation, and wounded our character. She commands not the ſhew, but the reality of meekneſs and gentleneſs; and by thus taking away the aliment of anger and the fomenters of diſcord, ſhe provides for the maintenance of peace, and the reſtoration of good temper among men, when it may have ſuſtained a temporary interruption.

Another excellence of Chriſtianity; a higher value by it ſet on moral than on intellectual attainments.

IT is another capital excellence of Chriſtianity, that ſhe values moral attainments at a far higher rate than intellectual acquiſitions, and propoſes to conduct her followers to the heights of virtue rather than of knowledge. On the contrary, moſt of the falſe religious ſyſtems which have prevailed in the world, have propoſed to reward the labour of their votary, by drawing aſide the veil which concealed from the vulgar eye their hidden myſteries, and by introducing him

Digitized by Google

CHAP. V.

him to the knowledge of their deeper and more ſacred doctrines.

THIS is eminently the caſe in the Hindoo, and in the Mahometan Religion, in that of China, and, for the moſt part, in the various modifications of ancient Paganiſm. In ſyſtems which proceed on this principle, it is obvious that the bulk of mankind can never make any great proficiency. There was accordingly, among the nations of antiquity, one ſyſtem, whatever it was, for the learned, and another for the illiterate. Many of the philoſophers ſpoke out, and profeſſed to keep the lower orders in ignorance for the general good; plainly ſuggeſting that the bulk of mankind was to be conſidered as almoſt of an inferior ſpecies. Ariſtotle himſelf countenanced this opinion. An oppoſite mode of proceeding naturally belongs to Chriſtianity, which without diſtinction profeſſes an equal regard for all human beings, and which was characterized by her firſt Promulgator as the meſſenger of "glad tidings to the poor."

BUT her preference of moral to intellectual excellence is not to be praiſed, only becauſe it is congenial with her general character, and ſuitable to the ends which ſhe profeſſes to have

Digitized by Google

have in view. It is the part of true wiſdom to endeavour to excel there, where we may really attain to excellence. This conſideration might be alone ſufficient to direct our efforts to the acquiſition of virtue rather than of knowledge.—How limited is the range of the greateſt human abilities! how ſcanty the ſtores of the richeſt human knowledge! Thoſe who undeniably have held the firſt rank, both for natural and acquired endowments, inſtead of thinking their pre-eminence a juſt ground of ſelf-exaltation, have commonly been the moſt forward to confeſs that their views were bounded and their attainments moderate. Had they indeed been leſs candid, this is a diſcovery which we could not have failed to make for ourſelves. Experience daily furniſhes us with examples of weakneſs, and ſhort-ſightedneſs, and error, in the wiſeſt and the moſt learned of men, which might ſerve to confound the pride of human wiſdom.

Not ſo in morals.—Made at firſt in the likeneſs of God, and ſtill bearing about us ſome faint traces of our high original, we are offered by our bleſſed Redeemer the means of purifying ourſelves from our corruptions, and of once more regaining the image of our Heavenly Father *. In love, the com-

* Eph. ii.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. V.

pendious expreſſion for almoſt every virtue, in fortitude under all its forms, in juſtice, in humility, and in all the other graces of the Chriſtian character, we are made capable of attaining to heights of real elevation: and were we but faithful in the uſe of the means of grace which we enjoy; the operations of the Holy Spirit, prompting and aiding our diligent endeavours, would infallibly crown our labours with ſucceſs, and make us partakers of a Divine nature. The writer has himſelf known ſome who have been inſtances of the truth of this remark. To the memory of one,(a) now no more, may he be permitted to offer the laſt tribute of reſpectful friendſhip? His courſe, ſhort but laborious, has at length terminated in a better world; and his luminous track ſtill ſhines in the ſight, and animates the efforts of all who knew him, and "marſhals "them the way" to Heavenly glory. Let me not be thought to undervalue any of the gifts of God, or of the fruits of human exertion: but let not theſe be prized beyond their proper worth. If one of thoſe little induſtrious reptiles, to which we have been well ſent for a leſſon of diligence and foreſight, were

(a) The Rev. Matthew Babington, of Rothley, in Leiceſterſhire, who died lately at Liſbon.

Digitized by Google

to pride itſelf upon its ſtrength, becauſe it could carry off a larger grain of wheat than any other of its fellow ants; ſhould we not laugh at the vanity which could be highly gratified with ſuch a contemptible pre-eminence? And is it far different to the eye of reaſon, when man, weak, ſhort-ſighted man, is vain of ſurpaſſing others in knowledge, in which at beſt his progreſs muſt be ſo limited; forgetting the true dignity of his nature, and the path which would conduct him to real excellence?

Excellence of the practical precepts of Chriſtianity.

THE unparalleled value of the precepts of Chriſtianity ought not to be paſſed over altogether unnoticed in this place, though it be needleſs to dwell on it; ſince it has been often juſtly recogniſed and aſſerted, and has in ſome points been ably illuſtrated, and powerfully enforced by the maſterly pen of a late writer. It is by no means, however, the deſign of this little work to attempt to trace the various excellences of Chriſtianity; but it may not have been improper to point out a few particulars, which, in the courſe of inveſtigation, have naturally fallen under our notice, and hitherto perhaps may ſcarcely have been enough regarded. Every ſuch inſtance, it ſhould always be remembered, is a

Digitized by Google

CHAP. V. freſh proof of Chriſtianity being a revelation from God.

It is ſtill leſs, however, the intention of the writer to attempt to vindicate the Divine origin of our Holy Religion. This taſk has often been executed by far abler advocates. In particular, every Chriſtian, with whatever reſerves his commendations muſt be qualified, ſhould be forward to confeſs his obligations *on this head* to the author before alluded to; whoſe uncommon acuteneſs has enabled him, in a field already ſo much trodden, to diſcover arguments which had eluded the obſervation of all by whom he was preceded, and whoſe unequalled perſpicuity puts his reader in complete poſſeſſion of the fruits of his ſagacity. Anxious, however, in my little meaſure, to contribute to the ſupport of this great cauſe, may it be permitted me to ſtate one argument, which impreſſes my mind with particular force. This is, the great variety of the *kinds* of evidence which have been adduced in proof of Chriſtianity, and the confirmation thereby afforded of its truth: —the proof from prophecy—from miracles—from the character of Chriſt—from that of his Apoſtles—from the nature of the doctrines of Chriſtianity—from the nature

Digitized by Google

ture and excellence of her *practical precepts*— from the accordance we have lately pointed out between the doctrinal and practical ſyſtem of Chriſtianity, whether conſidered each in itſelf or in their mutual relation to each other—from other ſpecies of internal evidence, afforded in the more abundance in proportion as the ſacred records have been ſcrutinized with greater care—from the accounts of contemporary or nearly contemporary writers—from the impoſſibility of accounting on any other ſuppoſition, than that of the truth of Chriſtianity, for its promulgation and early prevalence: theſe and other lines of argument have all been brought forward, and ably urged by different writers, in proportion as they have ſtruck the minds of different obſervers more or leſs forcibly. Now, granting that ſome obſcure and illiterate men, reſiding in a diſtant province of the Roman empire, had plotted to impoſe a forgery upon the world; though ſome foundation for the impoſture might, and indeed muſt, have been attempted to be laid; it ſeems, at leaſt to my underſtanding, morally impoſſible that *ſo many different ſpecies of proofs*, and all ſo ſtrong, ſhould have lent their *concurrent* aid, and have united their *joint* force in the eſtabliſhment of the falſehood. It may aſſiſt the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. V.

reader in eſtimating the value of this argument, to conſider upon how different a footing, in this reſpect, has reſted every other religious ſyſtem, without exception, which was ever propoſed to the world; and, indeed, every other hiſtorical fact, of which the truth has been at all conteſted.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

Brief Inquiry into the preſent State of Chriſtianity in this Country, with ſome of the Cauſes which have led to its critical Circumſtances. Its Importance to us as a political Community, and practical Hints for which the foregoing Conſiderations give occaſion.

IT may not be altogether improper to remind the reader, that hitherto our diſcuſſion has been merely concerning the prevailing Religious opinions of *profeſſed Chriſtians:* no longer confining ourſelves to perſons of this deſcription, let us now extend our inquiry, and briefly inveſtigate the *general* ſtate of Chriſtianity in this country.

THE tendency of Religion in general to promote the temporal welfare of political communities, is a fact which depends on ſuch obvious and undeniable principles, and which is ſo forcibly inculcated by the hiſtory of all ages, that there can be no neceſſity for entering into a formal proof of its truth. It has indeed been maintained, not

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

merely by Schoolmen and Divines, but by the moſt celebrated philoſophers, and moraliſts, and politicians of every age.

THE peculiar excellence in this reſpect alſo of Chriſtianity, conſidered independently of its truth or falſehood, has been recognized by many writers, who, to ſay the leaſt, were not diſpoſed to exaggerate its merits. Either or both of theſe propoſitions being admitted, the ſtate of Religion in a country at any given period, not to mention its connection with the eternal happineſs of the inhabitants, immediately becomes a queſtion of great *political* importance: and in particular it muſt be material to aſcertain whether Religion be in an advancing or in a declining ſtate; and if the latter be the caſe, whether there be any practicable means for preventing at leaſt its farther declenſion.

IF the repreſentations contained in the preceding chapters, of the ſtate of Chriſtianity among the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians, be not very erroneous; they may well excite ſerious apprehenſion in the mind of every reader, when conſidered merely in a political view. And this apprehenſion would be increaſed, if there ſhould appear reaſon to believe that, for ſome time paſt, Religion has been on the declin

Digitized by Google

decline amongſt us, and that it continues to decline at the preſent moment. CHAP. VI.

Ptelimi-nary con-ſideration; general tone of moral practice.

WHEN it is propoſed, however, to inquire into the actual ſtate of Religion in any country, and in particular to compare that ſtate with its condition at any former period; there is one preliminary obſervation to be made, if we would not be liable to groſs error. There exiſts, eſtabliſhed by tacit conſent, in every country, what may be called a general ſtandard or tone of morals, varying in the ſame community at different periods, and different at the ſame period in different ranks and ſituations in ſociety. Whoever falls below this ſtandard, and, not unfrequently, whoever alſo riſes above it, offending againſt this general rule, ſuffers proportionably in the general eſtimation. Thus a regard for character, which is commonly the governing principle among men, becomes to a certain degree, though no farther, an incitement to morality and virtue. It follows of courſe, that where the practice does no more than come up to the required level, it will be no ſufficient evidence of the exiſtence, much leſs will it furniſh any juſt meaſure of the force, of a real internal principle of Religion. Chriſtians, Jews, Turks,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

Turks, Infidels, and Heretics, perſons of ten thouſand different ſorts of paſſions and opinions, being members at the ſame time of the ſame community, and all conſcious that they will be examined by this ſame ſtandard, will regulate their conduct accordingly, and, with no great difference, will all adjuſt themſelves to the required meaſure.

It muſt alſo be remarked, that the cauſes which tend to raiſe or to depreſs this ſtandard, commonly produce their effects by ſlow and almoſt inſenſible degrees; and that it often continues for ſome time nearly the ſame, when the circumſtances, by which it was fixed, have materially altered.

It is a truth which will hardly be conteſted, that Chriſtianity, whenever it has at all prevailed, has raiſed the general ſtandard of morals to a height before unknown. Some actions, which among the ancients were ſcarcely held to be blemiſhes in the moſt excellent characters, have been juſtly conſidered by the laws of every Chriſtian community, as meriting the ſevereſt puniſhments. In other inſtances, virtues formerly rare have become common; and in particular a merciful and courteous temper has ſoftened the rugged manners, and humanized the brutal ferocity

Digitized by Google

ferocity prevalent among the moſt poliſhed nations of the heathen world. But from what has been recently obſerved, it is manifeſt, that, ſo far as external appearances are concerned, theſe effects, when once produced by Chriſtianity, are produced alike in thoſe who deny and in thoſe who admit her divine original; I had almoſt ſaid in thoſe who reject and thoſe who cordially embrace the doctrines of the Goſpel: and theſe effects might and probably would remain for a while, without any great apparent alteration, however her ſpirit might languiſh, or even her authority decline. The form of the temple, as was once beautifully remarked, may continue, when the *dii tutelares* have left it. When we are inquiring therefore into the real ſtate of Chriſtianity at any period; if we would not be deceived in this important inveſtigation, it becomes us to be ſo much the more careful not to take up with ſuperficial appearances.

Preſent ſtate of Chriſtianity among us inveſtigated.

IT may perhaps help us to aſcertain the advancing or declining ſtate of Chriſtianity in Great Britain at the preſent moment; and ſtill more to diſcover ſome of the cauſes by which that ſtate has been produced, to employ a little time in conſidering what might naturally be expected to be its actual ſituation;

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

tion; what advantages or diſadvantages ſuch a religion might be expected to derive, from the circumſtances in which it has been placed among us, and from thoſe in which it ſtill continues.

EXPERIENCE warrants, and reaſon juſtifies and explains the aſſertion, that Perſecution generally tends to quicken the vigour and extend the prevalence of the opinions which ſhe would eradicate. For the peace of mankind, it has grown at length almoſt into an axiom, that "her deviliſh engine back re-"coils upon herſelf." Chriſtianity eſpecially has always thriven under perſecution. At ſuch a ſeaſon ſhe has no lukewarm profeſſors; no adherents concerning whom it is doubtful to what party they belong. The Chriſtian is then reminded at every turn, that his Maſter's kingdom is not of this world. When all on earth wears a black and threatening aſpect, he looks up to Heaven for conſolation; he learns practically to conſider himſelf as a pilgrim and ſtranger. He then cleaves to fundamentals, and examines well his foundation, as at the hour of death. When Religion is in a ſtate of external quiet and proſperity, the contrary of all this naturally takes place. The ſoldiers of the church militant then for-

get

Digitized by Google

get that they are in a ſtate of warfare. Their ardour ſlackens, their zeal languiſhes. Like a colony long ſettled in a ſtrange country *(a)*, they are gradually aſſimilated in features, and demeanour, and language, to the native inhabitants, till at length almoſt every veſtige of peculiarity dies away. CHAP. VI.

If, in general, perſecution and proſperity be productive reſpectively of theſe oppoſite effects; this circumſtance alone might teach us what expectations to form concerning the ſtate of Chriſtianity in this country, where ſhe has long been embodied in an eſtabliſhment, which is intimately blended, and is generally and juſtly believed to have a common intereſt with our civil inſtitutions; which is liberally, though by no means too liberally, endowed, and, not more favoured in wealth than dignity, has been allowed "to "exalt her mitred front in courts and parlia-"ments:" an eſtabliſhment—the offices in which are extremely numerous, and theſe, not like the prieſthood of the Jews, filled up from a particular race, or, like that of the Hindoos, held by a ſeparate caſt in entailed ſucceſſion; but ſupplied from every claſs,

(a) The author muſt acknowledge himſelf indebted to Dr. Owen for this illuſtration.

and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

and branching by its widely extended ramifications into almoſt every individual family in the community: an eſtabliſhment—of which the miniſters are not, like the Roman Catholic clergy, debarred from forming matrimonial ties, but are allowed to unite themſelves, and multiply their holdings to the general maſs of the community by the cloſe bonds of family connection; not like ſome of the ſeverer of the religious orders, immured in colleges and monaſteries, but, both by law and cuſtom, permitted to mix without reſtraint in all the intercourſes of ſociety.

SUCH being the circumſtances of the paſtors of the church, let the community in general be ſuppoſed to have been for ſome time in a rapidly improving ſtate of commercial proſperity; let it alſo be ſuppoſed to have been making no unequal progreſs in all thoſe arts, and ſciences, and literary productions, which have ever been the growth of a poliſhed age, and are the ſure marks of a highly finiſhed condition of ſociety. It is not difficult to anticipate the effects likely to be produced on *vital* Religion, both in the clergy and the laity, by ſuch a ſtate of external proſperity as has been aſſigned to them reſpectively.

Digitized by Google

respectively. And these effects would be infallibly furthered, where the country in question should enjoy a free constitution of government. We formerly had occasion to quote the remark of an accurate observer of the stage of human life, that a much looser system of morals commonly prevails in the higher, than in the middling and lower orders of society. Now, in every country, of which the middling classes are daily growing in wealth and consequence, by the success of their commercial speculations; and, most of all, in a country having such a constitution as our own, where the acquisition of riches is the possession also of rank and power; with the comforts and refinements, the vices also of the higher orders are continually descending, and a mischievous uniformity of sentiments, and manners, and morals, gradually diffuses itself throughout the whole community. The multiplication of great cities also, and, above all, the habit, ever increasing with the increasing wealth of the country, of frequenting a splendid and luxurious metropolis, would powerfully tend to accelerate the discontinuance of the religious habits of a purer age, and to accomplish the substitution of a more relaxed morality. And it must even be confessed, that the commercial spirit, much

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

much as we are indebted to it, is not naturally favourable to the maintenance of the religious principle in a vigorous and lively ſtate.

In times like theſe, therefore, the ſtrict precepts and ſelf-denying habits of Chriſtianity naturally ſlide into diſuſe; and even among the better ſort of Chriſtians, are likely to be ſoftened, ſo far at leaſt as to be rendered leſs abhorrent from the general diſpoſition to relaxation and indulgence. In ſuch proſperous circumſtances, men, in truth, are apt to think very little about Religion. Chriſtianity, therefore, ſeldom occupying the attention of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians, and being ſcarcely at all the object of their ſtudy, we ſhould expect, of courſe, to find them extremely unacquainted with its tenets. Thoſe doctrines and principles indeed, which it contains in common with the law of the land, or which are ſanctioned by the general ſtandard of morals formerly deſcribed, being brought into continual notice and mention by the common occurrences of life, might continue to be recognized. But whatever ſhe contains peculiar to herſelf, and which ſhould not be habitually brought into recollection by the incidents of every day, might be expected to

Cauſes from which the peculiarities of Chriſtianity ſlide into diſuſe.

Digitized by Google

to be less and less thought of, till at length it should be almost wholly forgotten. Still more might this be naturally expected to become the case, if the peculiarities in question, should be, from their very nature, at war with pride, and luxury, and worldly mindedness, the too general concomitants of rapidly increasing wealth: and this would particularly happen among the laity; if the circumstance of their having been at any time abused to purposes of hypocrisy or fanaticism, should have prompted even some of the better disposed of the clergy, perhaps from well intentioned though erroneous motives, to bring them forward less frequently in their discourses on Religion.

When so many should thus have been straying out of the right path, some bold reformer might, from time to time, be likely to arise, who should not unjustly charge them with their deviation; but, though right perhaps in the main, yet deviating himself also in an opposite direction, and creating disgust by his violence, or vulgarity, or absurdities, he might fail, except in a few instances, to produce the effect of recalling them from their wanderings.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. IV.

STILL, however, the Divine Original of Chriſtianity would not be profeſſedly diſavowed; partly from a real, and more commonly from a political, deference for the eſtabliſhed faith, but moſt of all, from the bulk of mankind being not yet prepared, as it were, to throw away the ſcabbard, and to venture their eternal happineſs on the iſſue of its falſehood. Some bolder ſpirits, indeed, might be expected to deſpiſe the cautious moderation of theſe timid reaſoners, and to pronounce deciſively, that the Bible was a forgery: while the generality, profeſſing to believe it genuine, ſhould, leſs conſiſtently, be ſatisfied with remaining ignorant of its contents; and, when preſſed, ſhould diſcover themſelves by no means to believe many of the moſt important particulars contained in it.

WHEN, by the operation of cauſes like theſe, any country has at length grown into the condition which has been here ſtated; it is but too obvious, that, in the bulk of the community, Religion, already ſunk very low, muſt be haſtening faſt to her entire diſſolution. Cauſes energetic and active like theſe, though accidental hindrances may occaſionally thwart their operation, will not at once become

Digitized by Google

become ſluggiſh and unproductive. Their effect is ſure; and the time is faſt approaching, when Chriſtianity will be almoſt as openly diſavowed in the language, as in fact it is already ſuppoſed to have diſappeared from the conduct of men; when infidelity will be held to be the neceſſary appendage of a man of faſhion, and to *believe* will be deemed the indication of a feeble mind and a contracted underſtanding.

SOMETHING like what have been here premiſed are the conjectures which we ſhould naturally be led to form, concerning the ſtate of Chriſtianity in this country, and its probable iſſue, from conſidering her own nature, and the peculiar circumſtances in which ſhe has been placed. That her real condition differs not much from the reſult of this reaſoning from probability, muſt, with whatever regret, be confeſſed by all who take a careful and impartial ſurvey of the actual ſituation of things among us. But our hypothetical delineation, if juſt, will have approved itſelf to the reader's conviction, as we have gone along, by ſuggeſting its archetypes; and we may therefore be ſpared the painful and invidious taſk of pointing out, in detail, the ſeveral particulars wherein our

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

ſtatements are juſtified by facts. Every where we may actually trace the effects of increaſing wealth and luxury, in baniſhing one by one the habits, and new modelling the phraſeology, of ſtricter times; and in diffuſing throughout the middle ranks thoſe relaxed morals and diſſipated manners, which were formerly confined to the higher claſſes of ſociety. We meet, indeed, with more refinement, and more generally with thoſe amiable courteſies which are its proper fruits: thoſe vices alſo have become leſs frequent, which naturally infeſt the darkneſs of a ruder and leſs poliſhed age, and which recede on the approach of light and civilization:

> Defluxit numerus Saturnius, & grave virus
> Munditiæ pepulere:

But with theſe groſſneſſes, Religion, on the other hand, has alſo declined; God is forgotten; his providence is exploded; his hand is lifted up, but we ſee it not; he multiplies our comforts, but we are not grateful; he viſits us with chaſtiſements, but we are not contrite. The portion of the week ſet apart to the ſervice of Religion we give up, without reluctance, to vanity and diſſipation. And it is much if, on the periodical return of a day of national humiliation, having availed ourſelves of the certainty of an

Digitized by Google

interval from public buſineſs to ſecure a meeting for convivial purpoſes; we do not inſult the Majeſty of Heaven by feaſting and jollity, and thus deliberately diſclaim our being included in the ſolemn ſervices of this ſeaſon of penitence and recollection.

But when there is not this open and ſhameleſs diſavowal of Religion, few traces of it are to be found. Improving in almoſt every other branch of knowledge, we have become leſs and leſs acquainted with Chriſtianity. The preceding chapters have pointed out, among thoſe who believe themſelves to be orthodox Chriſtians, a deplorable ignorance of the Religion they profeſs, an utter forgetfulneſs of the peculiar doctrines by which it is characterized, a diſpoſition to regard it as a mere ſyſtem of ethics, and, what might ſeem an inconſiſtency, at the ſame time a moſt inadequate idea of the nature and ſtrictneſs of its practical principles. This declenſion of Chriſtianity into a mere ſyſtem of ethics, may partly be accounted for, as has been lately ſuggeſted, by conſidering the corruption of our nature, what Chriſtianity is, and in what circumſtances ſhe has been placed in this country. But it has alſo been conſiderably promoted by one peculiar

Chriſtianity reduced to a ſyſtem of ethics, and a cauſe aſſigned which has ſpecially operated in producing this effect.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

culiar cauſe, on which, for many reaſons, it may not be improper to dwell a little more particularly.

CHRISTIANITY in its beſt days (for the credit of our repreſentations let this be remembered, by thoſe who object to our ſtatement as auſtere and contracted) was ſuch as it has been delineated in the preſent work. This was the Religion of the moſt eminent Reformers, of thoſe bright ornaments of our country who ſuffered martyrdom under queen Mary; of their ſucceſſors in the times of Elizabeth; in ſhort, of all the pillars of our Proteſtant church; of many of its higheſt dignitaries; of Davenant, of Jewell, of Hall, of Reynolds, of Beveridge, of Hooker, of Andrews, of Smith, of Leighton, of Uſher, of Hopkins, of Baxter, *(a)*, and of many others of ſcarcely inferior

(a) I muſt beg leave to claſs among the brighteſt ornaments of the Church of England, this great man, who with his brethren was ſo ſhamefully ejected from the church in 1666, in violation of the royal word, as well as of the clear principles of juſtice. With his controverſial pieces I am little acquainted: but his practical writings, in four maſſy folios, are a treaſury of Chriſtian wiſdom; and it would be a moſt valuable ſervice to mankind to reviſe them, and perhaps to abridge them, ſo as to render them more ſuited to the taſte of modern readers. This has been already done in the caſe of his

Digitized by Google

inferior note. In their pages the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity were every where viſible, and on the deep and ſolid baſis of theſe doctrinal truths were laid the foundations of a ſuperſtructure of morals proportionably broad and exalted. Of this fact their writings ſtill extant are a deciſive proof: and they who may want leiſure, or opportunity, or inclination, for the peruſal of theſe valuable records, may ſatisfy themſelves of the truth of the aſſertion, that, ſuch as we have ſtated it, was the Chriſtianity of thoſe times, by conſulting our Articles and Homilies, or even by carefully examining our excellent Liturgy. But from that tendency to deterioration lately noticed, theſe great fundamental truths began to be ſomewhat leſs prominent in the compoſitions of many of the leading divines before the time of the civil wars. During that period, however, the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity were grievouſly abuſed by many of the ſectaries, who were foremoſt in the commotions of thoſe unhappy days; who while they talked copiouſly of the free grace

his Dying Thoughts, a beautiful little piece, and of his Saints' Reſt. His Life alſo, written by himſelf, and in a ſeparate volume, contains much uſeful matter, and many valuable particulars of the hiſtory of the times of Charles I. Cromwell, &c. &c.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

of Christ, and the operations of the Holy Spirit, were by their lives an open scandal to the name of Christian (a).

TOWARDS the close of the last century, the divines of the established Church (whether

(a) Let me by no means be understood to censure all the sectaries without discrimination. Many of them, and some who by the unhappy circumstances of the times became objects of notice in a political view, were men of great erudition, deep views of Religion, and unquestionable piety: and though the writings of the puritans are prolix, and, according to the fashion of their age, rendered rather perplexed than clear by multiplied divisions and subdivisions; yet they are a mine of wealth, in which any one who will submit to some degree of labour will find himself well rewarded for his pains. In particular the writings of Dr. OWEN, Mr. HOWE, and Mr. FLAVELL, well deserve this character: of the first mentioned author, there are two pieces which I would especially recommend to the reader's perusal, one, on Heavenly Mindedness, abridged by Dr. MAYO; the other, on the Mortification of Sin in Believers. While I have been speaking in terms of such high, and, I trust, such just eulogium of many of the teachers of the Church of England; this may not be an improper place to express the high obligations which we owe to the Dissenters, for many excellent publications. Of this number are Dr. EVANS's Sermons on the Christian Temper; and that most useful book, the Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul, by Dr. DODDRIDGE; also, his Life, by ORTON, and Letters; and two volumes of Sermons, one on Regeneration, the other on the Power and Grace of Christ: May the writer be permitted to embrace this opportunity of recommending two volumes, published separately, of Sermons, by the late Dr. WITHERSPOON, President of the College of New Jersey.

it

Digitized by Google

it arose from the obscurity of their own views, or from a strong impression of former abuses, and of the evils which had resulted from them) began to run into a different error. They professed to make it their chief object to inculcate the moral and practical precepts of Christianity, which they conceived to have been before too much neglected; but without sufficiently maintaining, often even without justly laying the grand foundation, of a sinner's acceptance with God; or pointing out how the practical precepts of Christianity grow out of her peculiar doctrines, and are inseparably connected with them (a). By this fatal error, the very genius and essential nature of Christianity imperceptibly underwent a change. She no longer retained her peculiar characters, or produced that appropriate frame of spirit by which her followers had been characterized. Facilis descensus. The example thus set was followed during the present century, and its effect was aided by various causes already pointed out. In addition to these, it may be proper to mention as a cause of powerful operation; that for the last fifty years the press has teemed

CHAP. VI.

(a) Vide Section vi. of the ivth Chapter, where we have expressly and fully treated of this most important truth,

with

CHAP. VI.

with moral eſſays, many of them publiſhed periodically, and moſt extenſively circulated; which, being conſidered either as works of mere entertainment, or, in which at leaſt entertainment was to be blended with inſtruction, rather than as religious pieces, were kept free from whatever might give them the air of ſermons, or cauſe them to wear an appearance of ſerioufneſs, inconſiſtent with the idea of relaxation. But in this way the fatal habit, of conſidering Chriſtian morals as diſtinct from Chriſtian doctrines, inſenſibly gained ſtrength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity went more and more out of ſight; and, as might naturally have been expected, the moral ſyſtem itſelf alſo began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which ſhould have ſupplied it with life and nutriment. At length, in our own days, theſe peculiar doctrines have almoſt altogether vaniſhed from the view. Even in many ſermons, ſcarcely any traces of them are to be found.

But the degree of neglect into which they are really fallen, may perhaps be rendered ſtill more manifeſt by appealing to another criterion. There is a certain claſs of publications, of which it is the object to

Digitized by Google

give us exact delineations of life and manners: and when these are written by authors of accurate observation and deep knowledge of human nature; (and many such there have been in our times) they furnish a more faithful picture, than can be obtained in any other way, of the prevalent opinions and feelings of mankind. It must be obvious that novels are here alluded to. A careful perusal of the most celebrated of these pieces would furnish a strong confirmation of the apprehension, suggested from other considerations, concerning the very low state of Religion in this country; but they would still more strikingly illustrate the truth of the remark, that the grand peculiarities of Christianity are almost vanished from the view. In a sermon, although throughout the whole of it there may have been no traces of these peculiarities, either directly or indirectly, the preacher closes with an ordinary form; which, if one were to assert that they were absolutely omitted, would immediately be alleged in contradiction of the assertion, and may just serve to protect them from falling into entire oblivion. But in novels, the writer is not so tied down. In these, people of Religion, and clergymen too, are placed in all possible situations, and the sentiments and language

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

language deemed ſuitable to the occaſion are aſſigned to them. They are introduced inſtructing, reproving, counſelling, comforting. It is often the author's intention to repreſent them in a favourable point of view, and accordingly he makes them as well informed and as good Chriſtians as he knows how. They are painted amiable, benevolent, and forgiving; but it is not too much to ſay, that if all the peculiarities of Chriſtianity had never exiſted, or had been proved to be falſe, the circumſtance would ſcarcely create the neceſſity of altering a ſingle ſyllable in any of the moſt celebrated of theſe performances. It is ſtriking to obſerve the difference which there is in this reſpect in ſimilar works of Mahometan authors, wherein the characters, which they mean to repreſent in a favourable light, are drawn vaſtly more obſervant of the peculiarities of their religion *(a)*.

Other bad ſymptoms as to the practical ſtate of Chriſtianity.

IT has alſo been a melancholy prognoſtic of the ſtate to which we are progreſſive, that many of the moſt eminent of the literati of modern times have been profeſſed unbelievers; and that others of them have diſcover-

(a) No exceptions have fallen within my own reading, but the writings of RICHARDSON.

ed

Digitized by Google

ed ſuch lukewarmneſs in the cauſe of Chriſt, as to treat with eſpecial good will, and attention, and reſpect, thoſe men, who, by their avowed publications, were openly aſſailing, or inſidiouſly undermining the very foundations of the Chriſtian hope; conſidering themſelves as more cloſely united to them by literature, than ſevered from them by the wideſt religious differences *(a)*. Can it then

CHAP. VI.

(a) It is with pain that the author finds himſelf compelled to place ſo great a writer as Dr. ROBERTSON in this claſs. But, to ſay nothing of his phlegmatic account of the Reformation; a ſubject which we ſhould have thought likely to excite in any one, who united the character of a Chriſtian Divine with that of an Hiſtorian, ſome warmth of pious gratitude for the good providence of God: to paſs over alſo the ambiguity, in which he leaves his readers as to his opinion of the authenticity of the Moſaic chronology, in his diſquiſitions on the trade of India; his letters to Mr. GIBBON, lately publiſhed, cannot but excite emotions of regret and ſhame in every ſincere Chriſtian. The author hopes, that he has ſo far explained his ſentiments as to render it almoſt unneceſſary to remark, what, however, to prevent miſconſtruction, he muſt here declare, that ſo far from approving, he muſt be underſtood decidedly to condemn, a hot, a contentious, much more an abuſive manner of oppoſing or of ſpeaking of the aſſailants of Chriſtianity. The Apoſtle's direction in this reſpect cannot be too much attended to. "The ſervant of the Lord muſt not ſtrive; but be gentle "unto all men; apt to teach, patient, in meekneſs inſtruct-"ing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves: if God peradventure "will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the "truth." (2 Timothy, ii. 24, 25.)

occaſion

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

occaſion ſurpriſe, that under all theſe circumſtances, one of the moſt acute and moſt forward of the profeſſed unbelievers *(a)* ſhould appear to anticipate, as at no great diſtance, the more complete triumph of his ſceptical principles; and that another author of diſtinguiſhed name *(b)*, not ſo openly profeſſing thoſe infidel opinions, ſhould declare of the writer above alluded to, whoſe great abilities had been ſyſtematically proſtituted to the open attack of every principle of Religion, both natural and revealed, "that he had "always conſidered him, both in his life-time "and ſince his death, as approaching as nearly "to the idea of a perfectly wiſe and virtuous "man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty "will permit?"

CAN there then be a doubt, whither tends the path in which we are travelling, and whither at length it muſt conduct us? If any ſhould heſitate, let them take a leſſon from experience. In a neighbouring country, ſeveral of the ſame cauſes have been in action; and they have at length produced their full effect. Manners corrupted, morals depraved,

(a) Mr. HUME.

(b) Vide Dr. A. Smith's Letter to W. Strahan, Eſq.

diſſipation

Digitized by Google

diſſipation predominant, above all, Religion diſcredited, and infidelity grown into repute and faſhion *(a)*, terminated in the public diſavowal of every religious principle, which had been uſed to attract the veneration of mankind. The repreſentatives of a whole nation publicly witneſſing, not only without horror, but, to ſay the leaſt, without diſapprobation, an open unqualified denial of the very exiſtence of God; and at length, as a body, withdrawing their allegiance from the Majeſty of Heaven.

Objection that the author's ſyſtem is too ſtrict, and that if it were to prevail the world could not go on.

THERE are not a few, perhaps, who may have witneſſed with apprehenſion, and may be ready to confeſs with pain, the gradual declenſion of Religion; but who at the ſame time may conceive that the writer of this tract is diſpoſed to carry things too far. They may even allege, that the degree of Religion for which he contends is inconſiſtent with the ordinary buſineſs of life, and with the well-being of ſociety; that if it were generally to prevail, people would be wholly engroſſed

(a) What is here ſtated muſt be acknowledged by all, be their political opinions concerning French events what they may; and it makes no difference in the writer's view of the ſubject, whether the ſtate of morals was or was not, quite, or nearly, as bad, before the French revolution.

by

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

by Religion, and all their time occupied by prayer and preaching. Men not being sufficiently interested in the pursuit of temporal objects, agriculture and commerce would decline, the arts would languish, the very duties of common life would be neglected; and, in short, the whole machine of civil society would be obstructed, and speedily stopped. An opening for this charge is given by an ingenious writer *(a)* alluded to in an early period of our work; and is even somewhat countenanced by an author since referred to, from whom such a sentiment justly excites more surprise *(b)*.

The charge refuted.

In reply to this objection it might be urged, that though we should allow it for a moment to be in a considerable degree well founded, yet this admission would not warrant the conclusion intended to be drawn from it. The question would still remain, whether our representation of what Christianity requires be agreeable to the word of God? For if it be, surely it must be confessed to be a matter of small account to sacrifice a little worldly comfort and prosperity, during the short span of our existence in this life, in order to secure

(*a*) SOAME JENYNS. (*b*) PALEY's Evidence.

a crown

Digitized by Google

a crown of eternal glory, and the enjoyment of thoſe pleaſures which are at God's right hand for evermore! it might be added alſo, that our bleſſed Saviour had fairly declared, that it would often be required of Chriſtians to make ſuch a ſacrifice; and had forewarned us, that, in order to be able to do it with cheerfulneſs whenever the occaſion ſhould arrive, we muſt habitually ſit looſe to all worldly poſſeſſions and enjoyments. And it might farther be remarked, that though it were even admitted, that the *general prevalence of vital Chriſtianity* ſhould ſomewhat interfere with the views of national wealth and aggrandiſement; yet that there is too much reaſon to believe that, do all we can, this general prevalence needs not to be apprehended, or, to ſpeak more juſtly, could not be hoped for. But indeed the objection on which we have now been commenting, is not only groundleſs, but the very contrary to it is the truth. If Chriſtianity, ſuch as we have repreſented it, were generally to prevail; the world, from being ſuch as it is, would become a ſcene of general peace and proſperity; and abating the chances and calamities "which fleſh is inſeparably heir to," would wear one unwearied face of complacency and joy.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

ON the firſt promulgation of Chriſtianity, it is true, ſome of her early converts ſeem to have been in danger of ſo far miſtaking the genius of the new Religion, as to imagine that in future they were to be diſcharged from an active attendance on their ſecular affairs. But the Apoſtle moſt pointedly guarded them againſt ſo groſs an error, and expreſsly and repeatedly enjoined them to perform the particular duties of their ſeveral ſtations with increaſed alacrity and fidelity, that they might thereby do credit to their Chriſtian profeſſion. This he did, at the ſame time that he preſcribed to them that predominant love of God and of Chriſt, that heavenly-mindedneſs, that comparative indifference to the things of this world, that earneſt endeavour after growth in grace and perfection in holineſs, which have already been ſtated as the eſſential characteriſtics of real Chriſtianity. It cannot therefore be ſuppoſed by any who allow to the Apoſtle even the claim of a conſiſtent inſtructor, much leſs by any who admit his Divine authority, that theſe latter precepts are incompatible with the former. Let it be remembered, that the grand characteriſtic mark of the true Chriſtian, which has been inſiſted on, is *his deſiring to pleaſe God in all his thoughts, and words, and actions; to take*

Digitized by Google

take the revealed word to be the rule of his belief and practice; to "let his light shine "before men;" and in all things to adorn the doctrine which he professes. No calling is proscribed, no pursuit is forbidden, no science or art, no pleasure is disallowed, which is reconcilable with this principle. It must indeed be confessed that Christianity would not favour that vehement and inordinate ardour in the pursuit of temporal objects, which tends to the acquisition of immense wealth, or of widely spread renown: nor is it calculated to gratify the extravagant views of those mistaken politicians, the chief object of whose admiration, and the main scope of whose endeavours for their country, are, extended dominion, and commanding power, and unrivalled affluence, rather than those more solid advantages of peace, and comfort, and security. These men would barter comfort for greatness. In their vain reveries they forget that a nation consists of individuals, and that true national prosperity is no other than the multiplication of particular happiness.

Good effects to us as a political community from the prevalence of vital Christianity.

But in fact, so far is it from being true that the prevalence of *real* Religion would produce a stagnation in life; that a man, whatever might be his employment or pursuit, would be

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

furniſhed with a new motive to proſecute it with alacrity, a motive far more conſtant and vigorous than any human proſpects can ſupply: at the ſame time, his ſolicitude being not ſo much to ſucceed in whatever he might be engaged in, as to act from a pure principle and leave the event to God; he would not be liable to the ſame diſappointments, as men who are active and laborious from a deſire of worldly gain or of human eſtimation. Thus he would poſſeſs the true ſecret of a life at the ſame time uſeful and happy. Following peace alſo with all men, and looking upon them as members of the ſame family, entitled not only to the debts of juſtice, but to the leſs definite and more liberal claims of fraternal kindneſs; he would naturally be reſpected and beloved by others, and be in himſelf free from the annoyance of thoſe bad paſſions, by which they who are actuated by worldly principles are ſo commonly corroded. If any country were indeed filled with men, each thus diligently diſcharging the duties of his own ſtation without breaking in upon the rights of others, but on the contrary endeavouring, ſo far as he might be able, to forward their views and promote their happineſs; all would be active and harmonious in the goodly frame of human ſociety. There

Digitized by Google

would be no jarrings, no diſcord. The whole machine of civil life would work without obſtruction or diſorder, and the courſe of its movements would be like the harmony of the ſpheres.

SUCH would be the happy ſtate of a truly Chriſtian nation within itſelf. Nor would its condition with regard to foreign countries form a contraſt to this its internal comfort. Such a community, on the contrary, peaceful at home, would be reſpected and beloved abroad. General integrity in all its dealings would inſpire univerſal confidence: differences between nations commonly ariſe from mutual injuries, and ſtill more from mutual jealouſy and diſtruſt. Of the former there would be no longer any ground for complaint; the latter would find nothing to attach upon. But if, in ſpite of all its juſtice and forbearance, the violence of ſome neighbouring ſtate ſhould force it to reſiſt an unprovoked attack, (for hoſtilities ſtrictly defenſive are thoſe only in which it would be engaged) its domeſtic union would double its national force; while the conſciouſneſs of a good cauſe, and of the general favour of Heaven, would invigorate its arm, and inſpirit its efforts.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

Poſition, that Chriſtianity is hoſtile to patriotiſm, oppoſed.

IT is indeed the poſition of an author, to whom we have had frequent occaſion to refer, and whoſe love of paradox has not ſeldom led him into error, that true Chriſtianity is an enemy to patriotiſm. If by patriotiſm is meant that miſchievous and domineering quality, which renders men ardent to promote, not the happineſs, but the aggrandiſement of their own country, by the oppreſſion and conqueſt of every other; to ſuch patriotiſm, ſo generally applauded in the Heathen world, that Religion muſt be indeed an enemy, whoſe foundation is juſtice, and whoſe compendious character is "peace,—and good will towards men." But if by patriotiſm be underſtood that quality which, without ſhutting up our philanthropy within the narrow bounds of a ſingle kingdom, yet attaches us in particular to the country to which we belong; of this true patriotiſm, Chriſtianity is the moſt copious ſource, and the ſureſt preſervative. The contrary opinion can indeed only have ariſen from not conſidering the fulneſs and univerſality of our Saviour's precepts. Not like the puny productions of human workmanſhip, which at the beſt can commonly ſerve but the particular purpoſe that they are ſpecially deſigned to anſwer; the moral, as well

Digitized by Google

well as the phyſical, principles of the great Author of all things are capable of being applied at once to ten thouſand different uſes; thus, amidſt infinite complication, preſerving a grand ſimplicity, and therein bearing the unambiguous ſtamp of their Divine Original. Thus, to ſpecify one out of the numberleſs inſtances which might be adduced; the principle of gravitation, while it is ſubſervient to all the mechanical purpoſes of common life, keeps at the ſame time the ſtars in their courſes, and ſuſtains the harmony of worlds.

THUS alſo in the caſe before us: ſociety conſiſts of a number of different circles of various magnitudes and uſes; and that circumſtance, wherein the principle of patriotiſm chiefly conſiſts, whereby the duty of patriotiſm is beſt practiſed, and the happieſt effects to the general weal produced, is, that it ſhould be the deſire and aim of every individual to fill well his own proper circle, as a part and member of the whole, with a view to the production of general happineſs. This our Saviour enjoined when he preſcribed the duty of univerſal love, which is but another term for the moſt exalted patriotiſm. Benevolence, indeed, when not originating from Religion,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

diſpenſes but from a ſcanty and precarious fund; and therefore, if it be liberal in the caſe of ſome objects, it is generally found to be contracted towards others. Men who, acting from worldly principles, make the greateſt ſtir about general philanthropy or zealous patriotiſm, are often very deficient in their conduct in domeſtic life; and very neglectful of the opportunities, fully within their reach, of promoting the comfort of thoſe with whom they are immediately connected. But true Chriſtian benevolence is always occupied in producing happineſs to the utmoſt of its power, and according to the extent of its ſphere, be it larger or more limited; it contracts itſelf to the meaſure of the ſmalleſt; it can expand itſelf to the amplitude of the largeſt. It reſembles majeſtic rivers, which are poured from an unfailing and abundant ſource. Silent and peaceful in their outſet, they begin with diſpenſing beauty and comfort to every cottage by which they paſs. In their further progreſs they fertilize provinces and enrich kingdoms. At length they pour themſelves into the ocean; where, changing their names but not their nature, they viſit diſtant nations and other hemiſpheres, and ſpread throughout the world the expanſive tide of their beneficence.

It

Digitized by Google

IT muſt be confeſſed, that many of the good effects, of which Religion is productive to political ſocieties, would be produced even by a falſe Religion, which ſhould preſcribe good morals, and ſhould be able to enforce its precepts by ſufficient ſanctions. Of this nature are thoſe effects, which depend on our calling in the aid of a Being who ſees the heart, in order to aſſiſt the weakneſs, and in various ways to ſupply the inherent defects of all human juriſprudence. But the ſuperior excellence of Chriſtianity in this reſpect muſt be acknowledged, both in the ſuperiority of her moral code, and in the powerful motives and efficacious means which ſhe furniſhes for enabling us to practiſe it; and in the tendency of her doctrines to provide for the obſervance of her precepts, by producing tempers of mind which correſpond with them.

BUT, more than all this; it has not perhaps been enough remarked, that true Chriſtianity, from her eſſential nature, appears peculiarly and powerfully adapted to promote the preſervation and healthfulneſs of political communities. What is in truth their grand malady? The anſwer is ſhort; Selfiſhneſs. This is that young diſeaſe received at the moment

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

moment of their birth, "which grows with "their growth, and ſtrengthens with their "ſtrength;" and through which they at length expire, if not cut off prematurely by ſome external ſhock or inteſtine convulſion.

THE diſeaſe of ſelfiſhneſs, indeed, aſſumes different forms in the different claſſes of ſociety. In the great and the wealthy, it diſplays itſelf in luxury, in pomp and parade; and in all the frivolities of a ſickly and depraved imagination, which ſeeks in vain its own gratification, and is dead to the generous and energetic purſuits of an enlarged heart. In the lower orders, when not motionleſs under the weight of a ſuperincumbent deſpotiſm, it manifeſts itſelf in pride, and its natural offspring, inſubordination in all its modes. But though the external effects may vary, the internal principle is the ſame; a diſpoſition in each individual to make ſelf the grand center and end of his deſires and enjoyments; to over-rate his own merits and importance, and of courſe to magnify his claims on others, and in return to under-rate their's on him; a diſpoſition to under-value the advantages, and over-ſtate the diſadvantages, of his condition in life. Thence ſpring rapacity and venality, and ſenſuality. Thence imperious

Digitized by Google

imperious nobles, and factious leaders; and an unruly commonalty, bearing with difficulty the inconveniences of a lower ſtation, and imputing to the nature or adminiſtration of their government the evils which neceſſarily flow from the very conſtitution of our ſpecies, or which perhaps are chiefly the reſult of their own vices and follies. The oppoſite to ſelfiſhneſs is public ſpirit; which may be termed, not unjuſtly, the grand principle of political vitality, the very *life's breath* of ſtates, which tends to keep them active and vigorous, and to carry them to greatneſs and glory.

THE tendency of public ſpirit, and the oppoſite tendency of ſelfiſhneſs, have not eſcaped the obſervation of the founders of ſtates, or of the writers on government; and various expedients have been reſorted to and extolled, for cheriſhing the one, and for repreſſing the other. Sometimes a principle of internal agitation and diſſenſion, reſulting from the very frame of the government, has been productive of the effect. Sparta flouriſhed for more than ſeven hundred years under the civil inſtitutions of Lycurgus; which guarded againſt the ſelfiſh principle, by prohibiting commerce, and impoſing univerſal poverty and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

and hardſhip. The Roman commonwealth, in which public ſpirit was cheriſhed, and ſelfiſhneſs checked, by the principle of the love of glory, was alſo of long continuance. This paſſion naturally operates to produce an unbounded ſpirit of conqueſt, which, like the ambition of the greateſt of its own heroes, was never ſatiated while any other kingdom was left it to ſubdue. The principle of political vitality, when kept alive only by means like theſe, merits the deſcription once given of eloquence: "Sicut flamma, materia alitur, "& motibus excitatur, & urendo clareſcit." But like eloquence, when no longer called into action by external cauſes, or fomented by civil broils, it gradually languiſhes. Wealth and luxury produce ſtagnation, and ſtagnation terminates in death.

To provide, however, for the continuance of a ſtate, by the admiſſion of internal diſſenſions, or even by the chilling influence of poverty, ſeems to be in ſome ſort ſacrificing the end to the means. Happineſs is the end for which men unite in civil ſociety; but in ſocieties thus conſtituted, little happineſs, comparatively ſpeaking, is to be found. The expedient, again, of preſerving a ſtate by the ſpirit of conqueſt, though even this has

Digitized by Google

has not wanted its admirers *(a)*, is not to be tolerated for a moment, when conſidered on principles of univerſal juſtice. Such a ſtate lives, and grows, and thrives, by the miſery of others, and becomes profeſſedly the general enemy of its neighbours, and the ſcourge of the human race. All theſe devices are in truth but too much like the fabrications of man, when compared with the works of the Supreme Being; clumſy, yet weak in the execution of their purpoſe, and full of contradictory principles and jarring movements.

I MIGHT here enlarge with pleaſure on the unrivalled excellence, in this very view, of the conſtitution under which we live in this happy country; and point out how, more perhaps than any which ever exiſted upon earth, it is ſo framed, as to provide at the ſame time for keeping up a due degree of public ſpirit, and yet for preſerving unimpaired the quietneſs, and comfort, and charities of private life; how it even extracts from ſelfiſhneſs itſelf many of the advantages

(a) See eſpecially that great hiſtorian, FERGUSON, who, in his Eſſay on Civil Society, endeavours to vindicate the cauſe of heroiſm from the cenſure conveyed by the poet:

"From Macedonia's madman to the Swede."

which,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

which, under leſs happily conſtructed forms of government, public ſpirit only can ſupply. But ſuch a political diſcuſſion, however grateful to a Britiſh mind, would here be out of place. It is rather our buſineſs to remark, how much Chriſtianity in every way ſets herſelf in direct hoſtility to ſelfiſhneſs, the mortal diſtemper of political communities; and conſequently, how their welfare muſt be inſeparable from her prevalence. It might, indeed be almoſt ſtated as the main object and chief concern of Chriſtianity, to root out our natural ſelfiſhneſs, and to rectify the falſe ſtandard which it impoſes on us; with views, however, far higher than any which concern merely our temporal and ſocial well-being; to bring us to a juſt eſtimate of ourſelves, and of all around us, and to a due impreſſion of the various claims and obligations reſulting from the different relations in which we ſtand. Benevolence, enlarged, vigorous, operative benevolence, is her maſter principle. Moderation in temporal purſuits and enjoyments, comparative indifference to the iſſue of worldly projects, diligence in the diſcharge of perſonal and civil duties, reſignation to the will of God, and patience under all the diſpenſations of his Providence, are among her daily leſſons. Humility is one of the

Digitized by Google

the essential qualities, which her precepts most directly and strongly enjoin, and which all her various doctrines tend to call forth and cultivate; and humility lays the deepest and surest grounds for benevolence. In whatever class or order of society Christianity prevails, she sets herself to rectify the particular faults, or, if we would speak more distinctly, to counteract the particular mode of selfishness, to which that class is liable. Affluence she teaches to be liberal and beneficent; authority, to bear its faculties with meekness, and to consider the various cares and obligations belonging to its elevated station as being conditions on which that station is conferred. Thus, softening the glare of wealth, and moderating the insolence of power, she renders the inequalities of the social state less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs, in their turn, to be diligent, humble, patient: reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences; that the present state of things is very short; that the objects, about which worldly men conflict so eagerly, are not worth the contest; that the peace of mind, which Religion offers to all ranks indiscriminately, affords

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

affords more true ſatisfaction than all the expenſive pleaſures which are beyond the poor man's reach; that in this view, however, the poor have the advantage, and that if their ſuperiors enjoy more abundant comforts, they are alſo expoſed to many temptations from which the inferior claſſes are happily exempted; that "having, food and raiment, "they ſhould be therewith content," for that their ſituation in life, with all its evils, is better than they have deſerved at the hand of God; finally, that all human diſtinctions will ſoon be done away, and the true followers of Chriſt will all, as children of the ſame Father, be alike admitted to the poſſeſſion of the ſame heavenly inheritance. Such are the bleſſed effects of Chriſtianity on the temporal well-being of political communities.

But vital Chriſtianity alone can produce theſe effects; and, ſtill more, we muſt either have this, or none at all.

BUT the Chriſtianity which can produce effects like theſe muſt be real, not nominal, deep, not ſuperficial. Such then is the Religion we ſhould cultivate, if we would realize theſe pleaſing ſpeculations, and arreſt the progreſs of political decay. But in the preſent circumſtances of this country, it is a farther reaſon for endeavouring to cultivate this vital Chriſtianity, ſtill conſidering its effects merely in a political view, that, according

Digitized by Google

cording to all human appearance, we must either have this or none: unless the prevalence of this be in some degree restored, we are likely, not only to lose all the advantages which we might have derived from true Christianity, but to incur all the manifold evils which would result from the absence of all religion. CHAP. VI.

In the first place, let it be remarked, that a weakly principle of Religion, (and even such an one, in a political view, is productive of many advantages,) though its existence may be prolonged if all external circumstances favour its continuance, can hardly be kept alive, when the state of things is so unfavourable to vital Religion, as it must be confessed to be in our condition of society. Nor is it merely the ordinary effects of a state of wealth and prosperity to which we here allude. Much also may justly be apprehended, from that change which has taken place in our general habits of thinking and feeling, concerning the systems and opinions of former times. At a less advanced period of society, indeed, the Religion of the state will be generally accepted, though it be not felt in its vital power. It was the Religion of our forefathers: with the bulk it is on

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

that account entitled to reverence, and its authority is admitted without queſtion. The eſtabliſhment in which it ſubſiſts pleads the ſame preſcription, and obtains the ſame reſpect. But in our days, things are very differently circumſtanced. Not merely the blind prejudice in favour of former times, but even the proper reſpect for them, and the reaſonable preſumption in their favour, has abated. Still leſs will the idea be endured, of any ſyſtem being kept up, when the impoſture is ſeen through by the higher orders, for the ſake of retaining the common people in ſubjection. A ſyſtem, if not ſupported by a real perſuaſion of its truth, will fall to the ground. Thus it not unfrequently happens, that in a more advanced ſtate of ſociety, a religious eſtabliſhment muſt be indebted for its ſupport to that very Religion, which in earlier times it foſtered and protected; as the weakneſs of ſome aged mother is ſuſtained, and her exiſtence lengthened, by the tender aſſiduities of the child whom ſhe had reared in the helpleſſneſs of infancy. So in the preſent inſtance, unleſs there be reinfuſed into the maſs of our ſociety, ſomething of that principle, which animated our eccleſiaſtical ſyſtem in its earlier days, it is vain for us to hope that the eſtabliſhment will very long continue: for the

Digitized by Google

anomaly will not much longer be borne, of an eſtabliſhment, the *actual* principles of the bulk of whoſe members, and even teachers, are ſo extremely different from thoſe which it profeſſes. But in proportion as vital Chriſtianity can be revived, in that ſame proportion the church eſtabliſhment is ſtrengthened; for the revival of vital Chriſtianity is the very reinfuſion of which we have been ſpeaking. This is the very Chriſtianity on which our eſtabliſhment is founded; and that which her Articles, and Homilies, and Liturgy, teach throughout.

But if, when the reign of prejudice, and even of honeſt prepoſſeſſion, and of grateful veneration, is no more (for by theſe almoſt any ſyſtem may generally be ſupported, before a ſtate, having paſſed the period of its maturity, is verging to its decline); if there are any who think that a dry, unanimated, Religion, like that which is now profeſſed by nominal Chriſtians, can hold its place; much more, that it can be revived among the general maſs of mankind, it may be affirmed, that, arguing merely on human principles, they know little of human nature. The kind of Religion which we have recommended, whatever opinion may be entertained

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

tained concerning its truth, and to ſay nothing of the agency of Divine Grace, muſt at leaſt be conceded to be the only one which is at all ill ſuited to make impreſſion upon the lower orders, by ſtrongly intereſting the paſſions of the human mind. If it be thought that a ſyſtem of ethics may regulate the conduct of the higher claſſes; ſuch an one is altogether unſuitable to the lower, who muſt be worked upon by their affections, or they will not be worked upon at all. The ancients were wiſer than ourſelves, and never thought of governing the community in general by their leſſons of philoſophy. Theſe leſſons were confined to the ſchools of the learned; while for the million, a ſyſtem of Religion, ſuch as it was, was kept up, as alone adapted to their groſſer natures. If this reaſoning fail to convince, we may ſafely appeal to experience. Let the Socinian and the moral teacher of Chriſtianity come forth, and tell us what effects *they* have produced on the lower orders. They themſelves will hardly deny the inefficacy of their inſtructions. But, bleſſed be God, the Religion, which we recommend, has proved its correſpondence with the character originally given of Chriſtianity, that it was calculated for the poor; by changing the whole condition of the maſs of ſociety

Appeal to experience.

Digitized by Google

ciety in many of the moſt populous diſtricts in this and other countries; and by bringing them from being ſcenes of almoſt unexampled wickedneſs and barbariſm, to be eminent for ſobriety, decency, induſtry, and, in ſhort, for whatever can render men uſeful members of civil ſociety.

Political good effects from the revival of vital Chriſtianity, and bad ones from its farther decline.

If indeed, through the bleſſing of Providence, a principle of true Religion ſhould in any conſiderable degree gain ground, there is no eſtimating the effects on public morals, and the conſequent influence on our political welfare. Theſe effects are not merely negative: though it would be much, merely to check the farther progreſs of a gangrene, which is eating out the very vital principles of our ſocial and political exiſtence. The general ſtandard of morality formerly deſcribed would be raiſed, it would at leaſt be ſuſtained and kept for a while from farther depreſſion. The eſteem which religious characters would perſonally attract, would extend to the ſyſtem which they ſhould hold, and to the eſtabliſhment of which they ſhould be members. Theſe are all merely natural conſequences. But to thoſe who believe in a ſuperintending Providence, it may be added, that the bleſſing of God might be drawn down

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

upon our country, and the ſtroke of his anger be for a while ſuſpended.

LET us be ſpared the painful taſk of tracing, on the contrary, the fatal conſequences of the extinction of Religion among us. They are indeed ſuch as no man, who is ever ſo little intereſted for the welfare of his country, can contemplate without the deepeſt concern. The very loſs of our church eſtabliſhment, though, as in all human inſtitutions, ſome defects may be found in it, would in itſelf be attended with the moſt fatal conſequences. No prudent man dares haſtily pronounce how far its deſtruction might not greatly endanger our civil inſtitutions. It would not be difficult to prove, that the want of it would alſo be in the higheſt degree injurious to the cauſe of Chriſtianity; and ſtill more, that it would take away what appears from experience to be one of the moſt probable means of its revival. To what a degree might even the avowed principles of men, not altogether without Religion, decline, when our ineſtimable Liturgy ſhould no longer remain in uſe! a Liturgy juſtly ineſtimable, which continually ſets before us a faithful model of the Chriſtian's belief, and practice, and language; reſtraining us, as far

as

Digitized by Google

as reſtraint is poſſible, from exceſſive deviations; furniſhing us with abundant inſtruction when we would return into the right path; affording an advantage-ground of no little value, to ſuch inſtructors as ſtill adhere to the good old principles of the Church of England; in ſhort, daily ſhaming us, by preſerving a living repreſentation of the opinions and habits of better times, as ſome hiſtorical record, which reproaches a degenerate poſterity, by exhibiting the worthier deeds of their progenitors. In ſuch a ſtate of things, to what a depth public morals might ſink, may be anticipated by thoſe who conſider what would then be the condition of ſociety; who reflect how bad principles and vicious conduct mutually aid each other's operation, and how, in particular, the former make ſure the ground which the latter may have gained; who remember, that in the lower orders, the ſyſtem of honour, and the reſponſibility of character, are wanting, which in the ſuperior claſſes, in ſome poor degree, ſupply the place of higher principles. It is well for the happineſs of mankind, that ſuch a community could not long ſubſiſt. The cement of ſociety being no more, the ſtate would ſoon be diſſolved into individuality.

CHAP. VI.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

LET it not be vainly imagined, that our ſtate of civilization muſt prevent the moral degeneracy here threatened. A neighbouring nation has lately furniſhed a lamentable proof, that ſuperior poliſh and refinement may well conſiſt with a very large meaſure of depravity. But to appeal to a ſtill more deciſive inſtance: it may be ſeen in the hiſtory of the latter years of the moſt celebrated of the Pagan nations, that the higheſt degrees of civilization and refinement are by no means inſeparable from the moſt ſhocking depravity of morals. The fact is certain, and the obvious inference with regard to ourſelves cannot be denied. The cauſe of this ſtrange phænomenon, (ſuch it really appears to our view) for which the natural corruption of man might hardly ſeem to account ſufficiently, has been explained by an inſpired writer. Speaking of the moſt poliſhed nations of antiquity, he obſerves; "Becauſe when they "knew God, they glorified him not as God, "and were not *ſolicitous* (a) to retain him in "their knowledge, he gave them over to a "reprobate mind." Let us then beware, and take warning from their example: let us not

(a) Such ſeems to be the juſt rendering of the word which our Teſtament tranſlates, "did not like to retain God "in their knowledge."

ſuffer

Digitized by Google

ſuffer our ſelf love to beguile us: let us not vainly perſuade ourſelves, that although proſperity and wealth may have cauſed us to relax a little too much, in thoſe more ſerious duties which regard our Maker, yet that we ſhall ſtop where we are; or, at leaſt, that we can never ſink into the ſame ſtate of moral depravation. Doubtleſs we ſhould ſink as low, if God were to give us up alſo to our own imaginations. And what ground have we to think he will not? If we would reaſon juſtly, we ſhould not compare ourſelves with the ſtate of the Heathen world when at its worſt; but with its ſtate at that period, when, for its forgetfulneſs of God, and its ingratitude towards him, it was ſuffered to fall, till at length it reached that worſt, its ultimate point of depreſſion. The Heathens had only reaſon and natural conſcience to direct them: we enjoy, ſuperadded to theſe, the clear light of Goſpel revelation, and a diſtinct declaration of God's dealings with them, to be a leſſon for our inſtruction. How then can we but believe that if we, enjoying advantages ſo much ſuperior to their's, are alike forgetful of our kind Benefactor, we alſo ſhall be left to ourſelves? and if ſo left, what reaſon can be aſſigned why we ſhould not fall into the ſame enormities?

WHAT

CHAP. VI.

Practical hints for the conduct of men in power, in the case of Religion, suggested by the above statements.

WHAT then is to be done? The inquiry is of the first importance, and the general answer to it is not difficult.—The causes and nature of the decay of Religion and morals among us sufficiently indicate the course, which, on principles of sound policy, it is in the highest degree expedient for us to pursue. The distemper of which, as a community, we are sick, should be considered rather as a moral than a political malady. How much has this been forgotten by the disputants of modern times! and accordingly, how transient may be expected to be the good effects of the best of their publications! We should endeavour to tread back our steps. Every effort should be used to raise the depressed tone of public morals. This is a duty particularly incumbent on all who are in the higher walks of life; and it is impossible not to acknowledge the obligations, which in this respect we owe as a nation, to those exalted characters, whom God in his undeserved mercy to us still suffers to continue on the throne, and who set to their subjects a pattern of decency and moderation rarely seen in their elevated station.

BUT every person of rank, and fortune, and abilities, should endeavour in like manner to exhibit a similar example, and recommend it to

Digitized by Google

to the imitation of the circle in which he moves. It has been the opinion of ſome well-meaning people, that by giving, as far as they poſſibly could with innocence, into the cuſtoms and practices of irreligious men, they might ſoften the prejudices too frequently taken up againſt Religion, of its being an auſtere gloomy ſervice; and thus ſecure a previous favourable impreſſion againſt any time, when they might have an opportunity of explaining or enforcing their ſentiments. This is always a queſtionable, and, it is to be feared, a dangerous policy. Many miſchievous conſequences neceſſarily reſulting from it might eaſily be enumerated. But it is a policy particularly unſuitable to our inconſiderate and diſſipated times, and to the lengths at which we are arrived. In theſe circumſtances, the moſt likely means of producing the *revulſion* which is required, muſt be boldly to proclaim the diſtinction between the adherents of "God and Baal." The expediency of this conduct in our preſent ſituation is confirmed by another conſideration, to which we have before had occaſion to refer. It is this—that when men are aware that ſomething of difficulty is to be effected, their ſpirits riſe to the level of the encounter; they make up their minds to bear hardſhips and brave dangers,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

gers, and to perſevere in ſpite of fatigue and oppoſition: whereas in a matter which is regarded as of eaſy and ordinary operation, they are apt to ſlumber over their work, and to fail in what a ſmall effort might have been ſufficient to accompliſh, for want of having called up the requiſite degree of energy and ſpirit. Conformably to the principle which is hereby ſuggeſted, in the circumſtances in which we are placed, the line of demarcation between the friends and the enemies of Religion ſhould now be made clear; the ſeparation ſhould be broad and obvious. Let him then, who wiſhes well to his country, no longer heſitate what courſe of conduct to purſue. The queſtion now is not, in what liberties he might warrantably indulge himſelf in another ſituation? but what are the reſtraints on himſelf which the exigencies of the preſent times render it adviſable for him to impoſe? Circumſtanced as we now are, it is more than ever obvious, that *the beſt man is the trueſt patriot.*

NOR is it only by their perſonal conduct, (though this mode will always be the moſt efficacious) that men of authority and influence may promote the cauſe of good morals. Let them in their ſeveral ſtations encourage virtue

Digitized by Google

virtue and discountenance vice in others. Let them enforce the laws by which the wisdom of our forefathers has guarded against the grosser infractions of morals; and congratulate themselves, that in a leading situation on the bench of justice there is placed a man, who, to his honour be it spoken, is well disposed to assist their efforts *(a)*. Let them favour and take part in any plans which may be formed for the advancement of morality. Above all things, let them endeavour to instruct and improve the rising generation; that, if it be possible, an antidote may be provided for the malignity of that venom, which is storing up in a neighbouring country. This has long been to my mind the most formidable feature of the present state of things in France; where, it is to be feared, a brood of moral vipers, as it were, is now hatching, which, when they shall have attained to their mischievous maturity, will go forth to poison the world. But fruitless will be all attempts to sustain, much more to revive, the fainting cause of morals, unless you can in some degree restore the prevalence of Evangelical Christianity. It is in morals as in

(a) It is a gratification to the writer's personal, as well as public feelings, to pay this tribute of respect to the character of Lord Chief Justice KENYON.

physics;

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

phyſics; unleſs the ſource of practical principles be elevated, it will be in vain to attempt to make them flow on a high level in their future courſe. You may force them for a while into ſome conſtrained poſition, but they will ſoon drop to their natural point of depreſſion. By all, therefore, who are ſtudious of their country's welfare, more particularly by all who deſire to ſupport our eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment, every effort ſhould be uſed to revive the Chriſtianity of our better days. The attempt ſhould eſpecially be made in the caſe of the paſtors of the Church, whoſe ſituation muſt render the principles which they hold a matter of ſupereminent importance. Wherever theſe teachers have ſteadily and zealouſly inculcated the true doctrines of the Church of England, the happieſt effects have commonly rewarded their labours. And it is worth obſerving, in the view which we are now taking, that theſe men, as might naturally be expected, are, perhaps without exception, friendly to our eccleſiaſtical and civil eſtabliſhments *(a)*; and conſequently, that their inſtructions and influence tend *directly*, as well as *indirectly*, to the maintenance of the cauſe of order and good govern-

(a) This is not thrown out raſhly, but aſſerted on the writer's own knowledge.

ment.

Digitized by Google

ment. Nor should it be forgotten by any who, judging with the abstract coldness of mere politicians, might doubt whether, by adopting the measures here recommended, a religious warmth would not be called into action, which might break out into mischievous irregularities; that experience proves that an establishment affords, from its very nature, the happy means of exciting a considerable degree of fervour and animation, and at the same time of restraining them within due bounds. The duty of encouraging vital Religion in the Church particularly devolves on all who have the disposal of ecclesiastical preferment, and more especially on the dignitaries of the sacred order. Some of these have already sounded the alarm; justly censuring the practice of suffering Christianity to degenerate into a mere system of ethics, and recommending more attention to the peculiar doctrines of our Religion. In our schools, in our universities, let the study be encouraged of the writings of those venerable divines, who flourished in the purer times of Christianity. Let even a considerable proficiency in their writings be required of candidates for ordination. Let our churches no longer witness that unseemly discordance, which has too much prevailed, between the prayers

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VI.

prayers which precede, and the ſermon which follows.

But it may be enough to have briefly hinted at the courſe of conduct, which, in the preſent circumſtances of this country, motives merely political ſhould prompt us to purſue. To all who have at heart the national welfare, the above ſuggeſtions are ſolemnly ſubmitted. They have not been urged altogether without miſgivings, leſt it ſhould appear, as though the concern of Eternity were melted down into a mere matter of temporal advantage, or political expediency. But ſince it has graciouſly pleaſed the Supreme Being ſo to arrange the conſtitution of things, as to render the prevalence of true Religion and of pure morality conducive to the well-being of ſtates, and the preſervation of civil order; and ſince theſe ſubordinate inducements are not unfrequently held forth, even by the ſacred writers; it ſeemed not improper, and ſcarcely liable to miſconſtruction, to ſuggeſt inferior motives to readers, who might be leſs diſpoſed to liſten to conſiderations of a higher order.

Would to God that the courſe of conduct here ſuggeſted might be fairly purſued! Would

Digitized by Google

Would to God that the happy consequences, which would result from the principles we have recommended, could be realized; and above all, that the influence of true Religion could be extensively diffused! It is the best wish which can be formed for his country, by one who is deeply anxious for its welfare:—

Lucem redde tuam, dux bone, patriæ!
Instar veris enim vultus ubi tuus
Affulsit populo, gratior it dies,
Et soles melius nitent.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII.

Practical Hints to various Deſcriptions of Perſons.

CHAP. VII.

THUS have we endeavoured to trace the chief defects of the religious ſyſtem of the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians in this country. We have pointed out their low idea of the importance of Chriſtianity in general; their inadequate conceptions of all its leading doctrines, and the effect hereby naturally produced in relaxing the ſtrictneſs of its practical ſyſtem; more than all, we have remarked their grand fundamental miſconception of its genius and eſſential nature. Let not therefore the difference between them and true believers be conſidered as a trifling difference; as a queſtion of forms or opinions. The queſtion is of the very ſubſtance of Religion; the difference is of the moſt ſerious and momentous amount. We muſt ſpeak out. *Their Chriſtianity is not Chriſtianity.* It wants the radical principle. It is mainly defective in all the grand conſtituents. Let them no longer then be deceived by names in a matter of infinite importance: but with humble

Difference between nominal, and real Chriſtians of the firſt importance.

Digitized by Google

humble prayer to the Source of all wiſdom, that he would enlighten their underſtandings, and clear their hearts from prejudice; let them ſeriouſly examine by the Scripture ſtandard their real belief and allowed practice, and they will become ſenſible of the ſhallowneſs of their ſcanty ſyſtem. SECT. I.

Helps in ſelf-examination—Frequent ſources of ſelf-deception pointed out.

If through the bleſſing of Providence on any thing which may have been here written, there ſhould be any whom it has diſpoſed to this important duty of ſelf-inquiry; let me previouſly warn them to be well aware of our natural proneneſs to think too favourably of ourſelves. Selfiſhneſs is one of the principal fruits of the corruption of human nature; and it is obvious that ſelfiſhneſs diſpoſes us to over-rate our good qualities, and to overlook or extenuate our defects. The corruption of human nature therefore being admitted, it follows undeniably, that in all our reckonings, if we would form a juſt eſtimate of our character, we muſt make an allowance for the effects of ſelfiſhneſs. It is alſo another effect of the corruption of human nature, to cloud our moral ſight, and blunt our moral ſenſibility. Something muſt therefore be allowed for this effect likewiſe. Doubtleſs, the perfect purity of the Supreme Being makes him ſee in us

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

ſtains, far more in number and deeper in dye, than we ourſelves can diſcover. Nor ſhould another aweful conſideration be forgotten. When we look into ourſelves, thoſe ſins only, into which we have lately fallen, are commonly apt to excite any lively impreſſion. Many individual acts of vice, or a continued courſe of vicious or diſſipated conduct, which, when recent, may have ſmitten us with deep remorſe, after a few months or years leave but very faint traces in our recollection; at leaſt, thoſe acts alone continue to ſtrike us ſtrongly, which were of very extraordinary magnitude. But the ſtrong impreſſions which they at firſt excited, not the faded images which they ſubſequently preſent to us, furniſh the true meaſure of their guilt: and to the pure eyes of God, this guilt muſt always have appeared far greater than to us. Now to the Supreme Being, we muſt believe that there is no paſt or future; as whatever *will be*, ſo whatever *has been*, is retained by him in preſent and unvarying contemplation, continuing always to appear juſt the ſame as at the firſt moment of its happening. Well may it then humble us in the ſight of that Being "who is of purer eyes than to behold "iniquity;" to call to mind that, unleſs our offences have been blotted out by our obtaining

ing an intereſt in the ſatisfaction of Chriſt, through true repentance and lively faith, we appear before him clothed with the ſins of our whole lives, in all their original depth of colouring, and with all the aggravations which we no longer particularly remember, but which, in general, we, perhaps, may recollect to have once filled us with ſhame and confuſion of face. The writer is the rather deſirous of enforcing this reflection; becauſe he can truly declare, that he has found no conſideration ſo efficacious in producing in his own mind the deepeſt ſelf-abaſement.

SECT. I.

In treating of the ſources of the erroneous eſtimates which we form of our religious and moral character, it may not, perhaps, be without its uſes to take this occaſion of pointing out ſome other common ſprings of ſelf-deception. Many perſons, as was formerly hinted, are miſled by the favourable opinions entertained of them by others; many, it is to be feared, miſtake a hot zeal for orthodoxy, for a cordial acceptance of the great truths of the Goſpel; and almoſt all of us, at one time or other, are more or leſs miſled by confounding the ſuggeſtions of the underſtanding with the impulſes of the will, the aſſent which our judgement gives

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

to religious and moral truths, with a hearty belief and approbation of them.

Outgrowing, or merely changing our vices, miſtaken for forſaking of all ſin.

THERE is another frequent ſource of ſelf-deception, which is productive of ſo much miſchief in life, that, though it may appear to lead to ſome degree of repetition, it would be highly improper to omit the mention of it in this place. That we may be the better underſtood, it may be proper to premiſe, that certain particular vices, and likewiſe that certain particular good and amiable qualities, ſeem naturally to belong to certain particular periods and conditions of life. Now, if we would reaſon fairly in eſtimating our moral character, we ought to examine ourſelves with reference to that particular "ſin "which does moſt eaſily beſet us," not to ſome other ſin to which we are not nearly ſo much liable. And in like manner, on the other hand, we ought not to account it matter of much ſelf-complacency, if we find in ourſelves that good and amiable quality which naturally belongs to our period or condition; but rather look for ſome leſs ambiguous ſign of a real internal principle of virtue. But we are very apt to reverſe theſe rules of judging; we are very apt, on the one hand, both

Digitized by Google

in ourſelves and in others, to excuſe "the "beſetting ſin," taking and giving credit for being exempt from others, to which we or they are leſs liable; and on the other hand, to value ourſelves extremely on our poſſeſſion of the good or amiable quality which naturally belongs to us, and to require no more ſatisfactory evidence of the *ſufficiency* at leaſt of our moral character. The bad effects of this partiality are aggravated by the practice, to which we are ſadly prone, of being contented, when we take a haſty view of ourſelves, with negative evidences of our ſtate; thinking it very well if we are not ſhocked by ſome great actual tranſgreſſion, inſtead of looking for the poſitive ſigns of a true Chriſtian, as laid down in the holy Scripture. SECT. I.

But the ſource of ſelf-deception, which it is more particularly our preſent object to point out, is a diſpoſition to conſider as a conqueſt of any particular vice, our merely forſaking it on our quitting the period or condition of life to which that vice belongs; when perhaps alſo we ſubſtitute for it the vice of the new period or condition on which we are entering. We thus miſtake our merely outgrowing our vices, or our relinquiſhing them from ſome change in our worldly circumſtances,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

cumſtances, for a thorough, or at leaſt for a ſufficient, reformation.

But this topic deſerves to be viewed a little more cloſely. Young people may, without much offence, be inconſiderate and diſſipated; the youth of one ſex may indulge occaſionally in licentious exceſſes; thoſe of the other may be ſupremely given up to vanity and pleaſure: yet, provided that they are ſweet tempered, and open, and not diſobedient to their parents or other ſuperiors, the former are deemed *good hearted* young men, the latter, *innocent* young women. Thoſe who love them beſt have no ſolicitude about their ſpiritual intereſts: and it would be deemed ſtrangely ſtrict in themſelves, or in others, to doubt of their becoming more religious as they advance in life; to ſpeak of them as being actually under the divine diſpleaſure; or, if their lives ſhould be in danger, to entertain any apprehenſions concerning their future deſtiny.

They grow older, and marry. The ſame licentiouſneſs, which was formerly conſidered in young men as a venial frailty, is now no longer regarded in the huſband and the father as compatible with the character of a decently religious man. The language

Digitized by Google

language is of this ſort; "they have ſown "their wild oats, they muſt now reform, "and be regular." Nor perhaps is the ſame manifeſt predominance of vanity and diſſipation deemed innocent in the matron: but if they are kind reſpectively in their conjugal and parental relations, and are tolerably regular and decent, they paſs for *mighty good ſort of people:* and it would be altogether unneceſſary ſcrupuloſity in them to doubt of their coming up to the requiſitions of the divine law, as far as in the preſent ſtate of the world can be expected from human frailty. Their hearts, however, are perhaps no more than before ſupremely ſet on the great work of their ſalvation, but are chiefly bent on increaſing their fortunes, or raiſing their families. Meanwhile they congratulate themſelves on their having amended from vices, which they are no longer ſtrongly tempted to commit, or their abſtaining from which ought not to be too confidently aſſumed as a teſt of the ſtrength of the religious principle, ſince the commiſſion of them would prejudice their characters, and perhaps injure their fortune in life. SECT. I.

OLD age has at length made its advances. Now, if ever, we might expect that it would be

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

be deemed high time to make eternal things the *main* object of attention. No ſuch thing! There is ſtill an appropriate good quality, the preſence of which calms the diſquietude, and ſatisfies the requiſitions both of themſelves and of thoſe around them. It is now required of them that they ſhould be good natured and cheerful, indulgent to the frailties and follies of the young; remembering, that when young themſelves they gave into the ſame practices. How oppoſite this to that dread of ſin, which is the ſure characteriſtic of the true Chriſtian; which cauſes him to look back upon the vices of his own youthful days with ſhame and ſorrow; and which, inſtead of conceding to young people to be wild and thoughtleſs, as a privilege belonging to their age and circumſtances, prompts him to warn them againſt what had proved to himſelf matter of ſuch bitter retroſpection! Thus, throughout the whole of life, ſome means or other are deviſed for ſtifling the voice of conſcience. "We cry peace while there is no peace!" and both to ourſelves and others that complacency is furniſhed, which ought only to proceed from a conſciouſneſs of being reconciled to God, and a humble hope of our poſſeſſing his favour.

I KNOW

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

Uncharitableness and true charity.

I KNOW that these sentiments will be termed uncharitable; but I must not be deterred by such an imputation. It is time to have done with that senseless cant of charity, which insults the understandings, and trifles with the feelings, of those who are really concerned for the happiness of their fellow-creatures. What matter of keen remorse and of bitter self-reproaches are they storing up for their future torment, who are themselves the miserable dupes of such misguided charity, or who, being charged with the office of watching over the eternal interests of their children or relations, suffer themselves to be lulled asleep, or beguiled by such shallow reasonings into sparing themselves the momentary pain of executing their important duty! Charity, indeed, is partial to the object of her regard; and where actions are of a doubtful quality, this partiality disposes her to refer them to a good, rather than to a bad motive. She is apt also somewhat to exaggerate merits, and to see amiable qualities in a light more favourable than that which strictly belongs to them. But true charity is wakeful, fervent, full of solicitude, full of good offices, not so easily satisfied, not so ready to believe that every thing is going on well as a matter of course; but jealous of mischief,

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

chief, apt to ſuſpect danger, and prompt to extend relief. Theſe are the ſymptoms by which genuine regard will manifeſt itſelf in a wife or a mother, in the caſe of the *bodily* health of the object of her affections. And where there is any real concern for the *ſpiritual* intereſts of others, it is characterized by the ſame infallible marks. That wretched quality, by which the ſacred name of charity is now ſo generally and ſo falſely uſurped, is no other than indifference; which, againſt the plaineſt evidence, or at leaſt where there is ſtrong ground of apprehenſion, is eaſily contented to believe that all goes well, becauſe it has no anxieties to allay, no fears to repreſs. It undergoes no alternation of paſſions; it is not at one time fluſhed with hope, nor at another chilled by diſappointment.

To a conſiderate and feeling mind, there is ſomething deeply afflicting, in ſeeing the engaging cheerfulneſs and cloudleſs gaiety incident to youth, welcomed as a ſufficient indication of internal purity by the delighted parents; who, knowing the deceitfulneſs of theſe flattering appearances, ſhould eagerly avail themſelves of this period, when once waſted never to be regained, of good humoured

Digitized by Google

moured acquieſcence and dutiful docility; a period when the ſoft and ductile temper of the mind renders it more eaſily ſuſceptible of the impreſſions we deſire; and when, therefore, habits ſhould be formed, which may aſſiſt our natural weakneſs to reſiſt the temptations to which we ſhall be expoſed in the commerce of maturer life. This is more eſpecially affecting in the female ſex, becauſe that ſex ſeems, by the very conſtitution of its nature, to be more favourably diſpoſed than ours to the feelings and offices of Religion; being thus fitted by the bounty of Providence, the better to execute the important taſk which devolves on it, of the education of our earlieſt youth. Doubtleſs, this more favourable diſpoſition to Religion in the female ſex, was graciouſly deſigned alſo to make women doubly valuable in the wedded ſtate: and it ſeems to afford to the married man the means of rendering an active ſhare in the buſineſs of life more compatible, than it would otherwiſe be, with the livelieſt devotional feelings; that when the huſband ſhould return to his family, worn and haraſſed by worldly cares or profeſſional labours, the wife, habitually preſerving a warmer and more unimpaired ſpirit of devotion, than is perhaps conſiſtent with being immerſed in the buſtle

Women naturally more diſpoſed to Religion than men.

of

CHAP. VII.

of life, might revive his languid piety; and that the religious impreſſions of both might derive new force and tenderneſs from the animating ſympathies of conjugal affection. Can a more pleaſing image be preſented to a conſiderate mind, than that of a couple, happy in each other and in the pledges of their mutual love, uniting in an act of grateful adoration to the author of all their mercies; recommending each other, and the objects of their common care, to the divine protection; and repreſſing the ſolicitude of conjugal and parental tenderneſs by a confiding hope, that, through all the changes of this uncertain life, the Diſpoſer of all things will aſſuredly cauſe all to work together for the good of them that love and put their truſt in him; and that, after this uncertain ſtate ſhall have paſſed away, they ſhall be admitted to a joint participation of never ending happineſs. It is ſurely no mean or ignoble office which we would allot to the female ſex, when we would thus commit to them the charge of maintaining in lively exerciſe whatever emotions moſt dignify and adorn human nature; when we would make them as it were the medium of our intercourſe with the heavenly world, the faithful repoſitories of the religious principle, for the benefit both of

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

of the preſent and of the riſing generation. Muſt it not then excite our grief and indignation, when we behold mothers, forgetful at once of their own peculiar duties, and of the high office which Providence deſigned their daughters to fulfil; exciting, inſtead of endeavouring to moderate in them, the natural ſanguineneſs and inconſiderateneſs of youth; hurrying them night after night to the reſorts of diſſipation; thus teaching them to deſpiſe the *common* comforts of the family circle; and, inſtead of ſtriving to raiſe their views, and to direct their affections to their true object, acting as if with the expreſs deſign ſtudiouſly to extinguiſh every ſpark of a devotional ſpirit, and to kindle in its ſtead an exceſſive love of pleaſure, and, perhaps, a principle of extravagant vanity, and ardent emulation!

Innocent young people—term much abuſed.

INNOCENT young women! Good hearted young men! Wherein does this *goodneſs of heart* and this *innocence* appear? Remember that we are fallen creatures, born in ſin, and naturally depraved. Chriſtianity recogniſes no *innocence* or *goodneſs of heart*, but in the remiſſion of ſin, and in the effects of the operation of divine grace. Do we find in theſe young perſons the characters, which the holy Scriptures

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

tures lay down as the only ſatisfactory evidences of a ſafe ſtate? Do we not on the other hand diſcover the ſpecified marks of a ſtate of alienation from God? Can the blindeſt partiality perſuade itſelf that *they* are loving, or ſtriving "to love God with all "their hearts, and minds, and ſouls, and "ſtrength?" Are *they* "ſeeking firſt the "kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs?" Are *they* "working out their ſalvation with "fear and trembling?" Are *they* "clothed "with humility?" Are *they* not, on the contrary, ſupremely given up to ſelf-indulgence? Are *they* not at leaſt "lovers of pleaſure "more than lovers of God?" Are the offices of Religion *their* ſolace or *their* taſk? Do *they* not come to theſe ſacred ſervices with reluctance, continue in them by conſtraint, and quit them with gladneſs? And of how many of *theſe* perſons may it not be affirmed in the ſpirit of the prophet's language: "The harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, "and wine, are in their feaſts: but they re-"gard not the work of the Lord, neither "conſider the operation of his hands?" Are not the youth of one ſex often actually committing, and ſtill more often wiſhing for the opportunity to commit, thoſe ſins of which the Scripture ſays expreſſly, "that they which "do

Digitized by Google

"do such things *shall not* inherit the kingdom "of God?" Are not the youth of the other sex principally intent on the gratification of vanity; and looking for their chief happiness to the resorts of gaiety and fashion, to all the multiplied pleasures which public places, or the still higher gratifications of more refined circles, can supply? SECT. I.

AND then, when the first ebullitions of youthful warmth are over, what is their boasted reformation? They may be decent, sober, useful, respectable, as members of the community, or amiable in the relations of domestic life. But is *this* the change of which the Scripture speaks? Hear the expressions which it uses, and judge for yourselves—"Except a man be *born again*, he cannot en-"ter into the kingdom of God."—"The *old* "*man*—is corrupt according to the deceitful "lusts;" an expression but too descriptive of the vain delirium of youthful dissipation, and of the false dreams of pleasure which it inspires; but "the *new man*" is awakened from this fallacious estimate of happiness; "*he* is renewed in knowledge after the image "of him that created him."—"He is created "*after God* in righteousness and true holi-"ness." The persons of whom we are speak-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

ing are no longer, indeed, ſo thoughtleſs, and wild, and diſſipated, as formerly; ſo negligent in their attention to objects of real value; ſo eager in the purſuit of pleaſure; ſo prone to yield to the impulſe of appetite. But this is no more than the change of which a writer of no very ſtrict caſt ſpeaks, as naturally belonging to their riper age:

> Converſis ſtudiis, ætas, animuſque virilis
> Quærit opes, & amicitias: inſervit honori:
> Commiſiſſe cavet, quod mox mutare laboret.
>
> HOR.

THIS is a point of infinite importance: let it not be thought tedious to ſpend even yet a few more moments in the diſcuſſion of it. Put the queſtion to another iſſue, and try it, by appealing to the principle of life being a ſtate of probation; (a propoſition, indeed, true in a certain ſenſe, though not exactly in that which is ſometimes aſſigned to it;) and you will ſtill be led to no very different concluſion. Probation implies reſiſting, in obedience to the dictates of Religion, appetites which we are naturally prompted to gratify. Young people are not tempted to be churliſh, intereſted, covetous; but to be inconſiderate and diſſipated, "lovers of pleaſure more "than lovers of God." People again in

middle

Digitized by Google

middle age are not ſo ſtrongly tempted to be thoughtleſs, and idle, and licentious. From exceſſes of this ſort they are ſufficiently withheld, particularly when happily ſettled in domeſtic life, by a regard to their characters, by the reſtraints of family connections, and by a ſenſe of what is due to the decencies of the married ſtate. *Their* probation is of another ſort; *they* are tempted to be ſupremely engroſſed by worldly cares, by family intereſts, by profeſſional objects, by the purſuit of wealth or of ambition. Thus occupied, they are tempted to "mind earthly rather than "heavenly things," forgetting "the one "thing needful;" to "ſet their affections" on temporal rather than eternal concerns, and to take up with "a form of godlineſs," inſtead of ſeeking to experience the power thereof: the foundations of this nominal Religion being laid in the forgetfulneſs, if not in the ignorance, of the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity. Theſe are the *ready-made* Chriſtians formerly ſpoken of, who conſider Chriſtianity as a geographical term, properly applicable to all thoſe who have been born and educated in a country wherein Chriſtianity is profeſſed; not as indicating a renewed nature, as expreſſive of a peculiar character, with its appropriate deſires and averſions, and

SECT. I.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

and hopes, and fears, and joys, and ſorrows. To people of this deſcription, the ſolemn admonition of Chriſt is addreſſed; "I know "thy works; that thou haſt a name that "thou liveſt, and art dead. Be watchful, "and ſtrengthen the things which remain "that are ready to die; for I have not found "thy works perfect before God."

Hints to ſuch as, having been hitherto careleſs, wiſh to become true Chriſtians.

If there be any one who is inclined to liſten to this ſolemn warning, who is awakened from his dream of falſe ſecurity, and is diſpoſed to be not only *almoſt* but *altogether* a Chriſtian—O! let him not ſtifle or diſſipate theſe beginnings of ſerioufneſs, but ſedulouſly cheriſh them as the "work-"ings of the Divine Spirit," which would draw him from the "broad" and crowded "road of deſtruction, into the narrow" and thinly peopled path "that leadeth to life." Let him retire from the multitude—Let him enter into his cloſet, and on his bended knees implore, for Chriſt's ſake and in reliance on his mediation, that God would "take away from him the heart of ſtone, "and give him a heart of fleſh;" that the Father of light would open his eyes to his true condition, and clear his heart from the clouds of prejudice, and diſſipate the deceitful

Digitized by Google

ful medium of self-love. Then let him carefully examine his past life, and his present course of conduct, comparing himself with God's word: and considering how any one might reasonably have been expected to conduct himself, to whom the Holy Scriptures had been always open, and who had been used to acknowledge them to be the revelation of the will of his Creator, and Governor, and Supreme Benefactor; let him there peruse the aweful denunciations against impenitent sinners; let him labour to become more and more deeply impressed with a sense of his own radical blindness and corruption; above all, let him steadily contemplate, in all its relations, that stupendous truth, *the incarnation and crucifixion of the only begotten Son of God, and the message of mercy proclaimed from the cross to repenting sinners.*—"Be ye reconciled unto God."—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and "thou shalt be saved." SECT. L.

WHEN he fairly estimates the guilt of sin by the costly satisfaction which was required to atone for it, and the worth of his soul by the price which was paid for its redemption, and contrasts both of these with his own sottish inconsiderateness; when he reflects on the amazing love and pity of Christ, and on the

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

cold and formal acknowledgements with which he has hitherto returned this infinite obligation, making light of the precious blood of the Son of God, and trifling with the gracious invitations of his Redeemer; surely, if he be not loſt to ſenſibility, mixed emotions of guilt, and fear, and ſhame, and remorſe, and ſorrow, will nearly overwhelm his ſoul; he will ſmite upon his breaſt, and cry out in the language of the publican, "God be merciful to me a ſinner." But, bleſſed be God, ſuch an one needs not deſpair—it is to perſons in this very ſituation, and with theſe very feelings, that the offers of the Goſpel are held forth, and its promiſes aſſured; "to the weary and heavy laden" under the burthen of their ſins; to them who thirſt for the water of life; to them who feel themſelves "tied and bound by the "chain of their ſins;" who abhor their captivity, and long earneſtly for deliverance. Happy, happy ſouls! whom the grace of God has viſited, "has brought out of dark-"neſs into his marvellous light," and "from "the power of Satan unto God." Caſt yourſelves then on his undeſerved mercy; he is full of love, and will not ſpurn you: ſurrender yourſelves into his hands, and ſolemnly reſolve, through his Grace, to dedicate henceforth

Digitized by Google

forth all your faculties and powers to his service. SECT. I.

It is your's now "to work out your own "salvation with fear and trembling," relying on the fidelity of him who has promised to "work in you both to will and to do of "his good pleasure." Ever look to him for help: your only safety consists in a deep and permanent sense of your own weakness, and in a firm reliance on his strength. If you "give all diligence," his power is armed for your protection, his truth is pledged for your security. You are enlisted under the banner of Christ—Fear not, though the world, and the flesh, and the devil are set in array against you.—"Faithful is he that hath pro-"mised;"—"be ye also faithful unto death, "and he will give you a crown of life."—"He that endureth to the end, the same "shall be saved." In such a world as this, in such a state of society as ours, especially if in the higher walks of life, you must be prepared to meet with many difficulties:—arm yourselves, therefore, in the first place, with a determined resolution not to rate human estimation beyond its true value; not to dread the charge of particularity, when it shall be necessary to incur it; but

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

let it be your conſtant endeavour to retain before your mental eye, that bright aſſemblage of inviſible ſpectators, who are the witneſſes of your daily conduct, and "to "ſeek that honour which cometh from God." You cannot advance a ſingle ſtep, till you are in ſome good meaſure poſſeſſed of this comparative indifference to the favour of men. We have before explained ourſelves too clearly to render it neceſſary to declare, that no one ſhould needleſsly affect ſingularity: but to aim at incompatible advantages, to ſeek to pleaſe God and the world, where their commands are really at variance, is the way to be neither reſpectable, nor good, nor happy. Continue to be ever aware of your own radical corruption and habitual weakneſs. Indeed, if your eyes be really opened, and your heart truly ſoftened, "hun-"gering and thirſting after righteouſneſs," riſing in your ideas of true holineſs, and proving the genuineneſs of your hope by deſiring "to purify yourſelf even as God is "pure;" you will become daily more and more ſenſible of your own defects, and wants, and weakneſſes; and more and more impreſſed by a ſenſe of the mercy and long ſuffering of that gracious Saviour, "who "forgiveth

Digitized by Google

" forgiveth all your ſin, and healeth all your " infirmities."

THIS is the ſolution of what to a man of the world might ſeem a ſtrange paradox, that in proportion as the Chriſtian grows in grace, he grows alſo in humility. Humility is indeed the vital principle of Chriſtianity; that principle by which from firſt to laſt ſhe lives and thrives, and in proportion to the growth or decline of which ſhe muſt decay or flouriſh. *This* firſt diſpoſes the ſinner in deep ſelf-abaſement to accept the offers of the Goſpel; *this*, during his whole progreſs, is the very ground and baſis of his feelings and conduct, both in relation to God, his fellow-creatures, and himſelf; and when at length he ſhall be tranſlated into the realms of glory, *this* principle ſhall ſtill ſubſiſt in undiminiſhed force: He ſhall " fall down; and caſt his crown " before the Lamb; and aſcribe bleſſing, and " honour, and glory, and power, to him that " ſitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, " for ever and ever." The *practical* benefits of this habitual lowlineſs of ſpirit are too numerous, and at the ſame time too obvious, to require enumeration. It will lead you to dread the beginnings, and fly from the occaſions of ſin; as that man would ſhun ſome infectious

Humility enforced.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

infectious diſtemper, who ſhould know that he was prediſpoſed to take the contagion. It will prevent a thouſand difficulties, and decide a thouſand queſtions, concerning worldly compliances; by which thoſe perſons are apt to be embarraſſed, who are not duly ſenſible of their own exceeding frailty, whoſe views of the Chriſtian character are not ſufficiently elevated, and who are not enough poſſeſſed with a continual fear of "grieving the Holy "Spirit of God," and of thus provoking him to withdraw his gracious influence. But if you are really ſuch as we have been deſcribing, you need not be urged to ſet the ſtandard of practice high, and to ſtrive after univerſal holineſs. It is the deſire of your hearts to act in all things with a ſingle eye to the favour of God, and thus the moſt ordinary actions of life are raiſed into offices of Religion. This is the purifying, the tranſmuting principle, which realizes the fabled touch, which changes all to gold. But it belongs to this deſire of pleaſing God, that we ſhould be continually ſolicitous to diſcover the path of duty; that we ſhould not indolently wait, ſatisfied with not refuſing occaſions of glorifying God, when they are forced upon us; but that we ſhould pray to God for wiſdom and ſpiritual underſtanding, that we may be acute

Digitized by Google

acute in discerning opportunities of serving him in the world, judicious in selecting and wise in improving them. Guard indeed against the distraction of worldly cares; and cultivate heavenly mindedness, and a spirit of continual prayer, and neglect not to watch incessantly over the workings of your deceitful heart: but be active also, and useful. Let not your precious time be wasted "in shapeless idleness;" an admonition which, in our days, is rendered but too necessary by the relaxed habits of persons even of real piety: but wisely husband and improve this fleeting treasure. Never be satisfied with your present attainments; but "forgetting the things "which are behind," labour still to "press "forward" with undiminished energy, and to run the race that is set before you without flagging in your course.

Love enforced.

ABOVE all, measure your progress by your improvement in love to God and man. "God "is Love." This is the sacred principle, which warms and enlightens the heavenly world, that blessed seat of God's visible presence. There it shines with unclouded radiance. Some scattered beams of it are graciously lent to us on earth, or we had been benighted and lost in darkness and misery; but

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

but a larger portion of it is infuſed into the hearts of the ſervants of God, who thus "are "renewed in the divine likeneſs," and even here exhibit ſome faint traces of the image of their heavenly father. It is the principle of love which diſpoſes them to yield themſelves up without reſerve to the ſervice of him, "who has bought them with the price "of his own blood."

Baſe nature of the Religion of the bulk of nominal Chriſtians.

SERVILE, and baſe, and mercenary, is the notion of Chriſtian practice among the bulk of nominal Chriſtians. They give no more than they *dare* not with-hold; they abſtain from nothing but what they *muſt* not practiſe. When you ſtate to them the doubtful quality of any action, and the conſequent obligation to deſiſt from it, they reply to you in the very ſpirit of Shylock, "they cannot find it in the "bond." In ſhort, they know Chriſtianity only as a ſyſtem of reſtraints. She is deſpoiled of every liberal and generous principle: ſhe is rendered almoſt unfit for the ſocial intercourſes of life, and is only ſuited to the gloomy walls of that cloiſter, in which they would confine her. But *true Chriſtians* conſider themſelves not as ſatisfying ſome rigorous creditor, but as diſcharging a debt of gratitude. Their's accordingly is not the ſtinted

Digitized by Google

SECT. I.

ſtinted return of a conſtrained obedience, but the large and liberal meaſure of a voluntary ſervice. This principle, therefore, prevents a thouſand *practical* embarraſſments, by which they are continually harraſſed, who act from a leſs generous motive; and who require it to be clearly aſcertained to them, that any gratification or worldly compliance, which may be in queſtion, is beyond the allowed boundary line of Chriſtian practice *. *This* principle regulates the true Chriſtian's choice of companions and friends, where he is at liberty to make an option; *this* fills him with the deſire of promoting the temporal welfare of all around him, and ſtill more, with pity

* "Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my "God," (ſays David) "of that which doth coſt me no-"thing." 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.

"They" (the Apoſtles) "departed from the preſence of "the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to "ſuffer ſhame for the name of Jeſus." Acts v. 41. See alſo 1 Theſſ. i. 6. Heb. x. 34. James i. 2. 1 Peter iv. 13, 14.

Such are the marks exhibited in Scripture of a true love to God: and though our regard for our common Lord is not put to the ſame ſevere teſt, as that of the Apoſtles and firſt Chriſtians was; yet, if the ſame principle exiſted in us alſo, it would ſurely diſpoſe us to act in the *ſpirit* of that conduct; and prompt us rather to be willing to exceed in ſelf-denials and labours for Chriſt's ſake, than to be ſo forward as we are to complain, whenever we are called upon to perform or to abſtain from any thing, though in an inſtance ever ſo little contrary to our inclinations.

and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

and love, and anxious ſolicitude for their ſpiritual happineſs. Indifference indeed in this reſpect is one of the ſureſt ſigns of a low or declining ſtate in Religion. *This* animating principle it is, which in the true Chriſtian's happier hour inſpirits his devotions, and cauſes him to delight in the worſhip of God; which fills him with conſolation, and peace, and gladneſs, and ſometimes even enables him "to rejoice with joy unſpeakable and full of "glory."

But this world is not his reſting place: here, to the very laſt, he muſt be a pilgrim and a ſtranger; a ſoldier, whoſe warfare ends only with life, ever ſtruggling and combating with the powers of darkneſs, and with the temptations of the world around him, and the ſtill more dangerous hoſtilities of internal depravity. The perpetual viciſſitudes of this uncertain ſtate, the peculiar trials and difficulties with which the life of a Chriſtian is chequered, and ſtill more, the painful and humiliating remembrance of his own infirmities, teach him to look forward, almoſt with outſtretched neck, to that promiſed day, when he ſhall be completely delivered from the bondage of corruption, and ſorrow and ſighing ſhall flee away. In the anticipation

Digitized by Google

anticipation of that bleſſed period, and comparing this churliſh and turbulent world, where competition, and envy, and anger, and revenge, ſo vex and agitate the ſons of men, with that bliſsful region where Love ſhall reign without diſturbance, and where all being knit together in bonds of indiſſoluble friendſhip, ſhall unite in one harmonious ſong of praiſe to the Author of their common happineſs, the true Chriſtian triumphs over the fear of death: he longs to realize theſe cheering images, and to obtain admiſſion into that bleſſed company.—With far more juſtice than it was originally uſed, he may adopt the beautiful exclamation—"O præclarum "illum diem, cum ad illud divinum animo- "rum concilium cœtumque proficiſcar, atque "ex hac turba et colluvione diſcedam!" SECT. II.

Falſehood of the objection, that we make Religion a gloomy ſervice.

WHAT has been now remarked, concerning the habitual feelings of the real believer, may ſuggeſt a reply to an objection common in the mouths of nominal Chriſtians, that we would deny men the innocent amuſements and gratifications of life; thus cauſing our Religion to wear a gloomy forbidding aſpect, inſtead of her true and natural face of cheerfulneſs and joy. This is a charge of ſo ſerious a nature, that although it lead into a digreſſion

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

greſſion, it may not be improper to take ſome notice of it.

In the firſt place, Religion prohibits no amuſement or gratification which is *really* innocent. The queſtion, however, of its innocence, muſt not be tried by the looſe maxims of worldly morality, but by the ſpirit of the injunctions of the word of God; and by the indulgence being conformable or not conformable to the genius of Chriſtianity, and to the tempers and diſpoſitions of mind enjoined on its profeſſors. There can be no diſpute concerning the true end of recreations. They are intended to refreſh our exhauſted bodily or mental powers, and to reſtore us, with renewed vigour, to the more ſerious occupations of life. Whatever, therefore, fatigues either body or mind, inſtead of refreſhing them, is not fitted to anſwer the deſigned purpoſe. Whatever conſumes more time, or money, or thought, than it is expedient (I might ſay *neceſſary*) to allot to mere amuſement, can hardly be approved by any one, who conſiders theſe talents as precious depoſits, for the expenditure of which he will have to give account. Whatever directly or indirectly muſt be likely to injure the welfare of a fellow-creature, can ſcarcely be a ſuitable

recreation

Digitized by Google

recreation for a Chriſtian, who is "to love his "neighbour as himſelf;" or a very conſiſtent *diverſion* for any one, the buſineſs of whoſe life is to diffuſe happineſs. SECT. I.

But does a Chriſtian never relax? Let us not ſo wrong and vilify the bounty of Providence, as to allow for a moment that the ſources of innocent amuſement are ſo rare, that men muſt be driven almoſt by conſtraint, to ſuch as are of a doubtful quality. On the contrary, ſuch has been the Creator's goodneſs, that almoſt every one, both of our phyſical, and intellectual, and moral faculties (and the ſame may be ſaid of the whole creation which we ſee around us) is not only calculated to anſwer the proper end of its being, by its ſubſerviency to ſome purpoſe of ſolid uſefulneſs, but to be the inſtrument of adminiſtering pleaſure.

Not content
With every food of life to nouriſh man,
Thou mak'ſt all nature beauty to his eye
And muſic to his ear.

Our Maker alſo, in his kindneſs, has ſo conſtructed us, that even mere viciſſitude is grateful and refreſhing — a conſideration which ſhould prompt us often to ſeek, from a

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

prudent *variation* of *uſeful purſuits*, that recreation, for which we are apt to reſort to what is altogether *unproductive* and *unfruitful*.

YET rich and multiplied are the ſprings of innocent relaxation. The Chriſtian relaxes in the temperate uſe of all the gifts of Providence. Imagination, and taſte, and genius, and the beauties of creation, and the works of art, lie open to him. He relaxes in the feaſt of reaſon, in the intercourſes of ſociety, in the ſweets of friendſhip, in the endearments of love, in the exerciſe of hope, of confidence, of joy, of gratitude, of univerſal good will, of all the benevolent and generous affections; which, by the gracious appointment of our Creator, while they diſintereſtedly intend only happineſs to others, are moſt ſurely productive to ourſelves of complacency and peace. O! little do they know of the true meaſure of enjoyment, who can compare theſe delightful complacencies with the frivolous pleaſures of diſſipation, or the coarſe gratifications of ſenſuality. It is no wonder, however, that the nominal Chriſtian ſhould reluctantly give up, one by one, the pleaſures of the world; and look back upon them, when relinquiſhed, with eyes of wiſtfulneſs and regret:

Digitized by Google

gret: becauſe he knows not the ſweetneſs of the delights with which true Chriſtianity repays thoſe trifling ſacrifices, and is greatly unacquainted with the *nature* of that pleaſantneſs which is to be found in the ways of Religion. SECT. I.

IT is indeed true, that when any one, who has long been going on in the groſs and unreſtrained practice of vice, is checked in his career, and enters at firſt on a religious courſe, he has much to undergo. Fear, guilt, remorſe, ſhame, and various other paſſions, ſtruggle and conflict within him. His appetites are clamorous for their accuſtomed gratification, and inveterate habits are ſcarcely to be denied. He is weighed down by a load of guilt, and almoſt overwhelmed by the ſenſe of his unworthineſs. But all this ought in fairneſs to be charged to the account of his paſt ſins, and not to that of his preſent repentance. It rarely happens, however, that this ſtate of ſuffering continues very long. When the mental gloom is the blackeſt, a ray of heavenly light occaſionally breaks in, and ſuggeſts the hope of better days. Even in this life it commonly holds true, "They that ſow in tears ſhall reap in "joy."

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

NEITHER, when we maintain, that the ways of Religion are ways of pleaſantneſs, do we mean to deny that the Chriſtian's internal ſtate is, through the whole of his life, a ſtate of diſcipline and warfare. Several of the cauſes which contribute to render it ſuch have been already pointed out, together with the workings of his mind in relation to them: but if he has ſolicitudes and griefs peculiar to himſelf, he has "joys "alſo with which a ſtranger intermeddles "not."

"DRINK deep," however, "or taſte not," is a direction full as applicable to Religion, if we would find it a ſource of pleaſure, as it is to knowledge. A little Religion is, it muſt be confeſſed, apt to make men gloomy, as a little knowledge to render them vain: hence the unjuſt imputation often brought upon Religion by thoſe, whoſe degree of Religion is juſt ſufficient, by condemning their courſe of conduct, to render them uneaſy; enough merely to impair the ſweetneſs of the pleaſures of ſin, and not enough to compenſate for the relinquiſhment of them by its own peculiar comforts. Thus theſe men bring up, as it were, an ill report of that land of promiſe, which, in truth, abounds with

Digitized by Google

with whatever, in our journey through life, can beſt refreſh and ſtrengthen us. SECT. I.

WE have enumerated ſome ſources of pleaſure which men of the world may underſtand, and muſt acknowledge to belong to the true Chriſtian; but there are others, and thoſe of a ſtill higher claſs, to which they muſt confeſs themſelves ſtrangers. To ſay nothing of a qualified, I dare not ſay an entire, exemption from thoſe diſtracting paſſions and corroding cares, by which he muſt naturally be haraſſed, whoſe treaſure is within the reach of mortal accidents; there is the humble quiet-giving hope of being reconciled to God, and of enjoying his favour; with that ſolid peace of mind, which the world can neither give nor take away, which reſults from a firm confidence in the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of God, and in the unceaſing care and kindneſs of a gracious Saviour: and there is the perſuaſion of the truth of the divine aſſurance, that all things ſhall work together for good.

WHEN the pulſe indeed beats high, and we are fluſhed with youth, and health, and vigour; when all goes on proſperouſly, and ſucceſs ſeems almoſt to anticipate our wiſhes;

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

then we feel not the want of the conſolations of Religion: but when fortune frowns, or friends forſake us; when ſorrow, or ſickneſs, or old age, comes upon us, then it is, that the ſuperiority of the pleaſures of Religion is eſtabliſhed over thoſe of diſſipation and vanity, which are ever apt to fly from us when we are moſt in want of their aid. There is ſcarcely a more melancholy ſight to a conſiderate mind, than that of an old man, who is a ſtranger to thoſe only true ſources of ſatisfaction. How affecting, and at the ſame time how diſguſting, is it to ſee ſuch an one awkwardly catching at the pleaſures of his younger years, which are now beyond his reach; or feebly attempting to retain them, while they mock his endeavours and elude his graſp! To ſuch an one, *gloomily* indeed does the evening of life ſet in! All is ſour and cheerleſs. He can neither look backward with complacency nor forward with hope: while the aged Chriſtian, relying on the aſſured mercy of his Redeemer, can calmly reflect that his diſmiſſion is at hand; that his redemption draweth nigh: while his ſtrength declines, and his faculties decay, he can quietly repoſe himſelf on the fidelity of God: and at the very entrance of the valley of the ſhadow of death, he can lift up an eye, dim,

Digitized by Google

perhaps, and feeble, yet occaſionally ſparkling with hope, and confidently looking forward to the near poſſeſſion of his heavenly inheritance, "to thoſe joys which eye hath "not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither hath it "entered into the heart of man to con-"ceive." SECT. I.

NEVER were there times which inculcated more forcibly, than thoſe in which we live, the wiſdom of ſeeking a happineſs beyond the reach of human viciſſitudes. What ſtriking leſſons have *we* had of the precarious tenure of all ſublunary poſſeſſions! Wealth, and power, and proſperity, how peculiarly tranſitory and uncertain! But Religion diſpenſes her choiceſt cordials in the ſeaſons of exigence, in poverty, in exile, in ſickneſs, and in death. The eſſential ſuperiority of that ſupport which is derived from Religion is leſs felt, at leaſt it is leſs apparent, when the Chriſtian is in full poſſeſſion of riches, and ſplendour, and rank, and all the gifts of nature and fortune. But when all theſe are ſwept away by the rude hand of time, or the rough blaſts of adverſity, the true Chriſtian ſtands, like the glory of the foreſt, erect and vigorous; ſtripped indeed of his ſummer foliage, but more than ever diſcovering to the ob-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

ſerving eye the ſolid ſtrength of his ſubſtantial texture:

Pondere fixa ſuo eſt, nudoſque per aera ramos
Attollens, trunco non frondibus efficit umbram.

SECT. II.

Advice to ſome who profeſs their full Aſſent to the fundamental Doctrines of the Goſpel.

SECT. II.

IN a former chapter we largely inſiſted on what may be termed the fundamental practical error of the bulk of profeſſed Chriſtians in our days; their either overlooking or miſconceiving the peculiar method, which the Goſpel has provided for the renovation of our corrupted nature, and for the attainment of every Chriſtian grace.

BUT there are miſtakes on the right hand and on the left; and our general proneneſs, when we are flying from one extreme to run into an oppoſite error, renders it neceſſary to ſuperadd another admonition. The generally prevailing error of the preſent day, indeed, is that fundamental one which was formerly pointed out. But while we attend, in the firſt place, to this; and, on the warrant both of Scripture and experience, preſcribe hearty repentance and lively faith, as the only foundation of all true holineſs;

Digitized by Google

neſs; we muſt at the ſame time guard againſt a practical miſtake of another kind. They who, with penitent hearts, have humbled themſelves before the croſs of Chriſt; and who, pleading his merits as their only ground of pardon and acceptance with God, have reſolved henceforth, through the help of his Spirit, to bring forth the fruits of righteouſneſs, are ſometimes apt to conduct themſelves as if they conſidered their work as now done; or at leaſt as if this were the whole they had to do, as often as, by falling afreſh into ſin, another act of repentance and faith may ſeem to have become neceſſary. There are not a few in our relaxed age, who thus ſatisfy themſelves with what may be termed *general* Chriſtianity; who feel *general* penitence and humiliation from a ſenſe of their ſinfulneſs *in general*, and *general* deſires of univerſal holineſs; but who neglect that vigilant and jealous care, with which they ſhould labour to extirpate every *particular* corruption, by ſtudying its nature, its root, its ramifications, and thus becoming acquainted with its ſecret movements, with the means whereby it gains ſtrength, and with the moſt effectual methods of reſiſting it. In like manner, they are far from ſtriving with perſevering alacrity for the acquiſition and improvement

SECT. II.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

provement of every Chriſtian grace. Nor is it unuſual for miniſters, who preach the truths of the Goſpel with fidelity, ability, and ſucceſs, to be themſelves alſo liable to the charge of dwelling altogether in their inſtructions on this *general* Religion: inſtead of tracing and laying open all the ſecret motions of inward corruption, and inſtructing their hearers how beſt to conduct themſelves in every diſtinct part of the Chriſtian warfare; how beſt to ſtrive againſt each particular vice, and to cultivate each grace of the Chriſtian character. Hence it is, that in too many perſons, concerning the ſincerity of whoſe general profeſſions of Religion we ſhould be ſorry to entertain a doubt, we yet ſee little progreſs made in the regulation of their tempers, in the improvement of their time, in the reform of their plan of life, or in ability to reſiſt the temptation to which they are particularly expoſed. They will confeſs themſelves, in general terms, to be "*miſerable ſinners*:" this is a tenet of their creed, and they feel even proud in avowing it. They will occaſionally alſo lament particular failings: but this confeſſion is ſometimes obviouſly made, in order to draw forth a compliment for the very oppoſite virtue: and where this is not the caſe, it is often not difficult

Digitized by Google

difficult to detect, under this falſe guiſe of contrition, a ſecret ſelf-complacency, ariſing from the manifeſtations which they have afforded of their acuteneſs or candour in diſcovering the infirmity in queſtion, or of their frankneſs or humility in acknowledging it. This will ſcarcely ſeem an illiberal ſuſpicion to any one, who either watches the workings of his own heart, or who obſerves, that the faults confeſſed in theſe inſtances are very ſeldom thoſe, with which the perſon is moſt clearly and ſtrongly chargeable.

We muſt plainly warn theſe men, and the conſideration is ſeriouſly preſſed on their inſtructors alſo, *that they are in danger of deceiving themſelves. Let them beware leſt they be nominal Chriſtians of another ſort.* Theſe perſons require to be reminded, that there is no *ſhort compendious method of holineſs*; but that it muſt be the buſineſs of their whole lives to grow in grace, and continually adding one virtue to another, as far as may be, "to go on towards perfection." "He "only that doeth righteouſneſs is righteous." Unleſs "they bring forth the fruits of the Spi-"rit," they can have no ſufficient evidence that they have received that "Spirit of Chriſt," "without

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

"without which they are none of his." But where, on the whole, our unwillingneſs to paſs an unfavourable judgement may lead us to indulge a hope, that "the root of the matter is found in them;" yet we muſt at leaſt declare to them, that inſtead of adorning the doctrine of Chriſt, they diſparage and diſcredit it. The world ſees not their ſecret humiliation, nor the exerciſes of their cloſets, but it is acute in diſcerning practical weakneſſes: and if it obſerve that they have the ſame eagerneſs in the purſuit of wealth or ambition, the ſame vain taſte for oſtentation and diſplay, the ſame ungoverned tempers, which are found in the generality of mankind; it will treat with contempt their pretences to ſuperior ſanctity and indifference to worldly things, and will be hardened in its prejudices againſt the only mode, which God has provided for our eſcaping the wrath to come, and obtaining eternal happineſs.

LET him then, who would be indeed a Chriſtian, watch over his ways and over his heart with unceaſing circumſpection. Let him endeavour to learn, both from men and books, particularly from the lives of eminent

Digitized by Google

eminent Chriſtians *(a)*, what methods have been actually found moſt effectual for the conqueſt of every particular vice, and for improvement in every branch of holineſs. Thus ſtudying his own character, and obſerving the moſt ſecret workings of his own mind, and of our common nature; the knowledge which he will acquire of the human heart in general, and eſpecially of his own, will be of the higheſt utility, in enabling him to avoid or to guard againſt the occaſions of evil: and it will alſo tend, above all things, to the growth of humility, and to the maintenance of that ſobriety of ſpirit and tenderneſs of conſcience, which are eminently characteriſtic of the true Chriſtian. It is by this unceaſing diligence, as the Apoſtle declares, that the ſervants of Chriſt muſt make

(a) It may not be amiſs to mention a few uſeful publications of this ſort. Walton's Lives, particularly the laſt edition by Mr. Zouch; Gilpin's Lives; the Lives of Biſhop Bedell and Biſhop Bull; of Archbiſhop Uſher; Fell's Life of Hammond; Archdeacon Hamilton's Life of Mr. Bonnel, Accompſant General of Ireland, recommended by the Archbiſhop of Dublin, the Biſhops of Meath, Derry, Limerick, Clogher, and Downe; ſome extracts from Burnet of the Life of the incomparable Leighton, prefixed to a volume of the latter's Sermons; Paſſages of the Life of Lord Rocheſter, by Burnet; the Life of Sir Matthew Hale; of the excellent Doddridge, by Orton; of Henry, father and ſon; of Mather; of Halyburton; Hamſon's and Whitehead's Life of Weſley; Life of Baxter, by himſelf, &c. &c. &c.

their

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII. their calling ſure. Their labour will not be thrown away; for "an entrance ſhall" at length "be miniſtered unto them abundantly, "into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord "and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt."

SECT. III.

Brief Obſervations addreſſed to Sceptics and Unitarians.

SECT. III. THERE is another claſs of men, an increaſing claſs, it is to be feared, in this country, that of abſolute unbelievers, with which this little work has properly no concern: but may the writer, ſincerely pitying their melancholy ſtate, be permitted to aſk them one plain queſtion? If Chriſtianity be not in their eſtimation true, yet is there not at leaſt a preſumption in its favour, ſufficient to entitle it to a ſerious examination; from its having been embraced, and that not blindly and implicitly, but upon full inquiry and deep conſideration, by Bacon, and Milton, and Locke, and Newton, and much the greater part of thoſe, who, by the reach of their underſtandings, or the extent of their knowledge, and by the freedom too of their minds, and

Digitized by Google

SECT. III.

and their daring to combat exiſting prejudices, have called forth the reſpect and admiration of mankind? It might be deemed ſcarcely fair to inſiſt on Churchmen, though ſome of them are among the greateſt names this country has ever known. Can the ſceptic in general ſay with truth, that he has either proſecuted an examination into the evidencies of Revelation at all, or at leaſt with a ſeriouſneſs and diligence in any degree proportioned to the importance of the ſubject? The fact is, and it is a fact which redounds to the honour of Chriſtianity, that infidelity is not the reſult of ſober inquiry and deliberate preference. It is rather the ſlow production of a careleſs and irreligious life, operating together with prejudices and erroneous conceptions, concerning the nature of the leading doctrines and fundamental tenets of Chriſtianity.

Progreſs of Infidelity.

TAKE the caſe of young men of condition, bred up by what we have termed nominal Chriſtians. When children, they are carried to church, and thence they become acquainted with ſuch parts of Scripture as are contained in our public ſervice. If their parents preſerve ſtill more of the cuſtoms of better times they are taught their Catechiſm, and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

and furnished with a little farther religious knowledge. After a while, they go from under the eyes of their parents; they enter into the world, and move forward in the path of life, whatever it may be, which has been assigned to them. They yield to the temptations which assail them, and become, more or less, dissipated and licentious. At least they neglect to look into their Bible; they do not enlarge the sphere of their religious acquisitions; they do not even endeavour, by reflection and study, to turn into what may deserve the name of knowledge and rational conviction, the opinions which, in their childhood, they had taken on trust.

They travel, perhaps, into foreign countries; a proceeding which naturally tends to weaken their nursery prejudice in favour of the Religion in which they were bred, and by removing them from all means of public worship, to relax their practical habits of Religion. They return home, and commonly are either hurried round in the vortex of dissipation, or engage with the ardour of youthful minds in some public or professional pursuit. If they read or hear any thing about Christianity, it is commonly only about those tenets which are subjects of controversy: and what

Digitized by Google

what reaches their ears of the Bible, from their occaſional attendance at church; though it may ſometimes impreſs them with an idea of the purity of Chriſtian morality, contains much which, coming thus detached, perplexes and offends them, and ſuggeſts various doubts and ſtartling objections, which a farther acquaintance with the Scripture would remove. Thus growing more and more to know Chriſtianity only by the difficulties it contains; ſometimes tempted by the ambition of ſhewing themſelves ſuperior to vulgar prejudice, and always prompted by the natural pride of the human heart to caſt off their ſubjection to dogmas impoſed on them; diſguſted, perhaps, by the immoral lives of ſome profeſſed Chriſtians, by the weakneſſes and abſurdities of others, and by what they obſerve to be the implicit belief of numbers, whom they ſee and know to be equally ignorant with themſelves, many doubts and ſuſpicions of greater or leſs extent ſpring up within them. Theſe doubts enter into the mind at firſt almoſt imperceptibly: they exiſt only as vague indiſtinct ſurmiſes, and by no means take the preciſe ſhape or the ſubſtance of a formed opinion. At firſt, probably, they even offend and ſtartle by their intruſion: but by degrees the unpleaſant ſenſations which they

SECT. III.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

once excited wear off: the mind grows more familiar with them. A confuſed ſenſe (for ſuch it is, rather than a formed idea) of its being deſirable that their doubts ſhould prove well founded, and of the comfort and enlargement which would be afforded by that proof, lends them much ſecret aid. The impreſſion becomes deeper; not in conſequence of being reinforced by freſh arguments, but merely by dint of having longer reſted in the mind; and as they increaſe in force, they creep on and extend themſelves. At length they diffuſe themſelves over the whole of Religion, and poſſeſs the mind in undiſturbed occupancy.

IT is by no means meant that this is univerſally the proceſs. But, ſpeaking generally, this might be termed, perhaps not unjuſtly, the *natural hiſtory* of ſcepticiſm. It approves itſelf to the experience of thoſe who have with any care watched the progreſs of infidelity in perſons around them; and it is confirmed by the written lives of ſome of the moſt eminent unbelievers. It is curious to read their own accounts of themſelves, the rather as they accord ſo exactly with the reſult of our own obſervation.—We find that they once perhaps gave a ſort of implicit hereditary aſſent to the truth

Digitized by Google

truth of Chriſtianity, and were what, by a miſchievous perverſion of language, the world denominates *believers*. How were they then awakened from their ſleep of ignorance? At what moment did the light of truth beam in upon them, and diſſipate the darkneſs in which they had been involved? The period of their infidelity is marked by no ſuch determinate boundary. Reaſon, and thought, and inquiry, had little or nothing to do with it. Having for many years lived careleſs and irreligious lives, and aſſociated with companions equally careleſs and irreligious; not by force of ſtudy and reflection, but rather by the lapſe of time, they at length attained to their infidel maturity. It is worthy of remark, that where any are reclaimed from infidelity, it is generally by a proceſs much more rational than that which has been here deſcribed. Something awakens them to reflection. They examine, they conſider, and at length yield their aſſent to Chriſtianity on what they deem ſufficient grounds.

FROM the account here given, it appears plainly that infidelity is generally the offspring of prejudice, and that its ſucceſs is chiefly to be aſcribed to the depravity of the moral character. This fact is confirmed by the un-

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

deniable truth, that in *ſocieties*, which conſiſt of individuals, infidelity is the natural fruit, not ſo much of a ſtudious and diſputatious, as of a diſſipated and vicious age. It diffuſes itſelf in proportion as the general morals decline; and it is embraced with leſs apprehenſion, when every infidel is kept in ſpirits, by ſeeing many around him who are ſharing fortunes with himſelf.

To any fair mind this conſideration alone might be offered, as ſuggeſting a ſtrong argument againſt infidelity, and in favour of Revelation. And the friends of Chriſtianity might juſtly retort the charge, which their opponents often urge with no little affectation of ſuperior wiſdom; that we implicitly ſurrender ourſelves to the influence of prejudice, inſtead of examining diſpaſſionately the ground of our faith, and yielding our aſſent only according to the degree of evidence.

In our own days, when it is but too clear that infidelity increaſes, it is not in conſequence of the reaſonings of the infidel writers having been much ſtudied, but from the progreſs of luxury, and the decay of morals: and, ſo far as this increaſe may be traced at all to the works of ſceptical writers; it has

Digitized by Google

been produced, not by argument and diſcuſſion, but by ſarcaſms and points of wit, which have operated on weak minds, or on nominal Chriſtians, by bringing gradually into contempt, opinions which, in their caſe, had only reſted on the baſis of blind reſpect and the prejudices of education. It may therefore be laid down as an axiom, that *infidelity is in general a diſeaſe of the heart more than of the underſtanding*. If Revelation were aſſailed only by reaſon and argument, it would have little to fear. The literary oppoſers of Chriſtianity, from Herbert to Hume, have been ſeldom read. They made ſome ſtir in their day: during their ſpan of exiſtence they were noiſy and noxious; but like the locuſts of the eaſt, which for a while obſcure the air, and deſtroy the verdure, they were ſoon ſwept away and forgotten. Their very names would be ſcarcely found, if Leland had not preſerved them from oblivion. SECT. III.

THE account which has been given, of the ſecret, but grand, ſource of infidelity, may perhaps juſtly be extended, as being not ſeldom true in the caſe of thoſe who deny the fundamental doctrines of the Goſpel. Unitarians.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

IN the courſe which we lately traced from nominal orthodoxy to abſolute infidelity, Unitarianiſm *(a)* is indeed, a ſort of half-way houſe, if the expreſſion may be pardoned; a ſtage on the journey, where ſometimes a perſon indeed finally ſtops, but where, not unfrequently, he only pauſes for a while, and then purſues his progreſs.

THE Unitarian teachers by no means profeſs to abſolve their followers from the unbending ſtrictneſs of Chriſtian morality. They preſcribe the predominant love of God, and an habitual ſpirit of devotion: but it is an unqueſtionable fact; a fact which they themſelves almoſt admit, that this claſs of religioniſts is not in general diſtinguiſhed for ſuperior purity of life; and ſtill leſs for that frame of mind, which, by the injunction "to "be ſpiritually, not carnally, minded," the word of God preſcribes to us, as one of the

(a) The author is aware, that he may perhaps be cenſured for conceding this term to the claſs of perſons now in queſtion, ſince orthodox Chriſtians equally contend for the unity of the Divine Nature: and it perhaps may hardly be a ſufficient excuſe, that, it not being his object particularly to refute the errors of Unitarianiſm, he uſes the term in its popular ſenſe rather than give needleſs offence. He thus guards, however, againſt any falſe conſtruction being drawn from his uſe of it.

ſureſt

Digitized by Google

ſureſt teſts of our experiencing the vital power of Chriſtianity. On the contrary, in point of fact, *Unitarianiſm* ſeems to be reſorted to, not merely by thoſe who are diſguſted with the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity; but by thoſe alſo who are ſeeking a refuge from the ſtrictneſs of her practical precepts; and who, more particularly, would eſcape from the obligation which ſhe impoſes on her adherents, rather to incur the dreaded charge of ſingularity, than fall in with the declining manners of a diſſipated age.

UNITARIANISM, where it may be ſuppoſed to proceed from the underſtanding rather than from the heart, is not unfrequently produced by a confuſed idea of the difficulties, or, as they are termed, the impoſſibilities which orthodox Chriſtianity is ſuppoſed to involve. It is not our intention to enter into the controverſy (*a*): but it may not be improper to

(*a*) The author of this treatiſe has, ſince its completion, peruſed a work entitled, Calviniſm and Socinianiſm compared, by A. FULLER, &c: and, without reference to the peculiarities of Calviniſm, he is happy to embrace this opportunity of confeſſing the high obligation which, in common with all the friends of true Religiôn, he owes to the author of that highly valuable publication for his maſterly defence of the doctrines of Chriſtianity, and his acute refutation of the oppoſite errors.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

Advantage poſſeſſed by Deiſts and Unitarians in contending with their opponents.

make one remark as a guard to perſons in whoſe way the arguments of the Unitarians may be likely to fall; namely, that one great advantage poſſeſſed by Deiſts, and perhaps in a ſtill greater degree by Unitarians, in their warfare with the Chriſtian ſyſtem, reſults from the very circumſtances of their being the aſſailants. They urge what they ſtate to be powerful arguments againſt the truth of the fundamental doctrines of Chriſtianity, and then call upon men to abandon them as poſts no longer tenable. But they, who are diſpoſed to yield to this aſſault, ſhould call to mind, that it has pleaſed God ſo to eſtabliſh the conſtitution of all things, that perplexing difficulties and plauſible objections may be adduced againſt the moſt eſtabliſhed truths; ſuch, for inſtance, as the being of a God, and many others both phyſical and moral. In all caſes, therefore, it becomes us, not on a partial view to reject any propoſition, becauſe it is attended with difficulties; but to compare the difficulties which it involves, with thoſe which attend the alternative propoſition which muſt be embraced on its rejection. We ſhould put to the proof the alternative propoſition in its turn, and ſee whether it be not ſtill leſs tenable than that which we are ſummoned

Digitized by Google

ſummoned to abandon. In ſhort, we ſhould examine circumſpectly on all ſides; and abide by that opinion which, on carefully balancing all conſiderations, appears fairly entitled to our preference. Experience, however, will have convinced the attentive obſerver of thoſe around him, that it has been for want of adverting to this juſt and obvious principle, that the Unitarians in particular have gained moſt of their proſelytes from the Church, ſo far as argument has contributed to their ſucceſs. If the Unitarians, or even the Deiſts, were conſidered in their turn as maſters of the field; and were in their turn attacked, both by arguments tending to diſprove their ſyſtem directly, and to diſprove it indirectly, by ſhewing the high probability of the truth of Chriſtianity, and of its leading and peculiar doctrines, it is moſt likely that they would ſoon appear wholly unable to keep their ground. In ſhort, reaſoning fairly, there is no medium between abſolute *Pyrrhoniſm* and true Chriſtianity: and if we reject the latter on account of its difficulties, we ſhall be ſtill more loudly called upon to reject every other ſyſtem which has been offered to the acceptance of mankind. This conſideration might, perhaps, with advantage be more

SECT. III.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

more attended to than it has been, by thoſe who take upon them to vindicate the truth of our holy Religion: as many, who from inconſideration, or any other cauſe, are diſpoſed to give up the great fundamentals of Chriſtianity, would be ſtartled by the idea, that on the ſame principle on which they did this, they muſt give up the hope of finding any reſt for the ſole of their foot on any ground of Religion, and not ſtop ſhort of unqualified Atheiſm.

Half Unbelievers.

BESIDES the claſs of thoſe who profeſſedly reject revelation, there is another, and that alſo, it is to be feared, an increaſing one, which may be called the claſs of half-unbelievers, who are to be found in various degrees of approximation to a ſtate of abſolute infidelity. The ſyſtem, if it deſerve the name, of theſe men, is groſsly irrational. Hearing many who aſſert and many who deny the truth of Chriſtianity, and not reflecting ſeriouſly enough to conſider that it muſt be either true or falſe, they take up a ſtrange ſort of middle opinion of its qualified truth. They conceive that there muſt be ſomething in it, though by no means to the extent to which it is puſhed by orthodox Chriſtians.

Digitized by Google

Chriſtians. They grant the reality of future puniſhment; and even that they themſelves cannot altogether expect to eſcape it; yet, "they truſt it will not go ſo hard with them "as the churchmen ſtate:" and though diſbelieving almoſt every material doctrine which Chriſtianity contains; yet, even in their own minds, they by no means conceive themſelves to be inliſted under the banners of infidelity, or to have much cauſe for any great apprehenſion leſt Chriſtianity ſhould prove true.

But let theſe men be reminded, that there is no middle way. If they can be prevailed on to look into their Bible, and do not make up their minds abſolutely to reject its authority; they muſt admit that there is no ground whatever for this vain hope, which they ſuffer themſelves to indulge, of eſcaping but with a ſlight meaſure of puniſhment. Nor let them think their guilt inconſiderable. Is it not groſsly criminal to trifle with the long-ſuffering of God, to deſpiſe alike his invitations and his threatenings, and the offer of his Spirit of grace, and the precious blood of the Redeemer? Far different is the Scripture eſtimate; "How ſhall we eſcape if we neglect "ſo

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

"ſo great ſalvation?" "It ſhall be more "tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the "day of judgement," than for them, who voluntarily ſhut their eyes againſt that full light, which the bounty of Heaven has poured out upon them. Theſe half-unbelievers are even more reprehenſible than downright ſceptics, for remaining in this ſtate of careleſs uncertainty, without endeavouring to aſcertain the truth or falſehood of revelation. The probability which they admit, that it may be true, impoſes on them an additional and an undeniable obligation to inquiry. But both to them and to decided ſceptics it muſt be plainly declared, that they are in theſe days leſs excuſable than ever, for not looking into the grounds and proofs on which is reſted the truth of Chriſtianity; for never before were theſe proofs ſo *plainly, and at ſo eaſy a rate*, offered to the conſideration of mankind. Through the bounty of Providence, the more widely ſpreading poiſon of infidelity has in our days been met with more numerous and more powerful antidotes. One of theſe has been already pointed out: and it ſhould be matter of farther gratitude to every real Chriſtian, that in the very place on which modern infidelity had diſplayed the ſtandard

Digitized by Google

ſtandard of victory, a warrior in the ſervice of Religion, a man of the moſt acute diſcernment and profound reſearch, has been raiſed up by Providence to quell their triumph *(a)*. He was ſoon taken from us; but happily for him and for ourſelves, not till he had announced, that, like the Magi of old, he had ſeen the ſtar of Chriſt in the Eaſt, and had fallen down and worſhipped him. Another ſhould be mentioned with honour, who is purſuing the track which that great man had pointed out *(b)*. Henceforth let all objectors againſt Chriſtianity, on the ground of its being diſproved by the oriental records, be put to ſilence. The ſtrength of their cauſe conſiſted in their ignorance, and in our own, of oriental learning. They availed themſelves for a while of our being in a ſtate of darkneſs; but the light of day has at length broken in and expoſed to deſerved contempt their ſuperficial ſpeculations. SECT. III.

THE infatuation of theſe unbelievers upon truſt would be leſs ſtriking, if they were

(a) It is almoſt ſuperfluous to ſtate, that Sir WILLIAM JONES is here meant, who, from the teſtimony borne to his extraordinary talents by Sir John Shore, in his firſt addreſs to the Aſiatic Society of Calcutta, appears to have been a man of moſt extraordinary genius and aſtoniſhing erudition.

(b) Mr. MAURICE.

able

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

able altogether to decline Chriſtianity; and were at liberty to relinquiſh their pretenſions to its rewards, on condition of being exempted from its puniſhments. But that is not the caſe; they muſt ſtand the riſk of the encounter, and their eternal happineſs or miſery is ſuſpended upon the iſſue *(a)*. What muſt be the emotions of theſe men, on firſt opening their eyes in the world of ſpirits, and being convinced, too late, of the aweful reality of their impending ruin? May the mercy and the power of God awaken them from their deſperate ſlumber, while life is yet ſpared, and there is yet ſpace for repentance!

(a) This argument is preſſed with uncommon force in PASCAL's Thoughts on Religion, a work highly valuable, though not in every part to be approved; abounding in particular with thoſe deep views of Religion, which the name of its author prepares us to expect.

Digitized by Google

SECT. IV.

Advice ſuggeſted by the ſtate of the times to true Chriſtians.

SECT. IV.

TO thoſe, who really deſerve the appellation of true Chriſtians, much has been ſaid incidentally in the courſe of the preſent work. It has been maintained, and the propoſition will not be diſputed by any ſound or experienced politician, that they are always moſt important members of the community. But we may boldly aſſert, that there never was a period wherein, more juſtly than in the preſent, this could be affirmed of them; whether the ſituation, in all its circumſtances, of our own country be attentively conſidered, or the general ſtate of ſociety in Europe. Let them on their part ſeriouſly weigh the important ſtation which they fill, and the various duties which it now peculiarly enforces on them. If we conſult the moſt intelligent accounts of foreign countries, which have been recently publiſhed, and compare them with the reports of former travellers; we muſt be convinced, that Religion and the ſtandard of morals

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

morals are every where declining, abroad even more rapidly than in our own country. But ſtill, the progreſs of irreligion, and the decay of morals at home, are ſuch as to alarm every conſiderate mind, and to forebode the worſt conſequences, unleſs ſome remedy can be applied to the growing evil. We can depend only upon true *Chriſtians* for effecting, in any degree, this important ſervice. Their ſyſtem is that of our national church: and in proportion, therefore, as their ſyſtem prevails, or as it increaſes in reſpect and eſtimation, from the manifeſt good conduct of its followers; in that very proportion the church is ſtrengthened in the foundations, on which alone it can be much longer ſupported, the eſteem and attachment of its members, and of the nation at large. Zeal is required in the cauſe of Religion; they only can feel it. The charge of ſingularity muſt be incurred; they only will dare to encounter it. Uniformity of conduct, and perſeverance in exertion, will be requiſite; among no others can we look for thoſe qualities.

LET true Chriſtians then, with becoming earneſtneſs, ſtrive in all things to recommend their profeſſion, and to put to ſilence the vain ſcoffs

Digitized by Google

ſcoffs of ignorant objectors. Let them boldly aſſert the cauſe of Chriſt in an age when ſo many, who bear the name of Chriſtians, are aſhamed of Him: and let them conſider as devolved on Them the important duty of ſuſpending for a while the fall of their country, and, perhaps, of performing a ſtill more extenſive ſervice to ſociety at large; not by buſy interference in politics, in which it cannot but be confeſſed there is much uncertainty; but rather by that ſure and radical benefit of reſtoring the influence of Religion, and of raiſing the ſtandard of morality. SECT. IV.

Let them be active, uſeful, generous towards others; manifeſtly moderate and ſelf-denying in themſelves. Let them be aſhamed of idleneſs, as they would be of the moſt acknowledged ſin. When Providence bleſſes them with affluence, let them withdraw from the competition of vanity; and, without fordidneſs or abſurdity, ſhew by their modeſt demeanour, and by their retiring from diſplay, that, without affecting ſingularity, they are not ſlaves to faſhion; that they conſider it as their duty to ſet an example of moderation and ſobriety, and to reſerve for nobler and more diſintereſted purpoſes, that money, which others ſelfiſhly waſte in parade, and

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

dress, and equipage. Let them evince, in short, a manifest moderation in all temporal things; as becomes those whose affections are set on higher objects than any which this world affords, and who possess, within their own bosoms, a fund of satisfaction and comfort, which the world seeks in vanity and dissipation. Let them cultivate a catholic spirit of universal good will, and of amicable fellowship towards all those, of whatever sect or denomination, who, differing from them in non-essentials, agree with them in the grand fundamentals of Religion. Let them countenance men of real piety wherever they are found; and encourage in others every attempt to repress the progress of vice, and to revive and diffuse the influence of Religion and Virtue. Let their earnest prayers be constantly offered, that such endeavours may be successful, and that the abused long-suffering of God may still continue to us the invaluable privilege of vital Christianity.

Let them pray continually for their country in this season of national difficulty. We bear upon us but too plainly the marks of a declining empire. Who can say but that the Governor of the universe, who declares himself to be a God who hears the prayers of his servants, may, in answer to their intercessions,

Digitized by Google

sions, for a while avert our ruin, and continue to us the fulness of those temporal blessings, which in such abundant measure we have hitherto enjoyed *(a)*. Men of the world, indeed, however they may admit the natural operation of natural causes, and may therefore confess the effects of Religion and Morality in promoting the well being of the community; may yet, according to their humour, with a smile of complacent pity, or a sneer of supercilious contempt, read of the service which real Christians may render to their country, by conciliating the favour and calling down the blessing of Providence. It may appear in their eyes an instance of the same superstitious weakness, as that which prompts the terrified inhabitant of Sicily to bring forth the image of his tutelar saint, in order to stop the destructive ravages of Ætna. We are, however, sure, if we believe the Scripture, that God will be disposed to favour the nation to which his servants belong; and that, in fact, such as They, have often been the unknown and unhonoured instruments of drawing down on their country the blessings of safety and prosperity.

(a) Vide, Some exquisitely beautiful lines in the last book of Cowper's Task, wherein this sentiment is introduced.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

But it would be an inſtance in myſelf of that very falſe ſhame which I have condemned in others, if I were not boldly to avow my firm perſuaſion, that *to the decline of Religion and Morality our national difficulties muſt both directly and indirectly be chiefly aſcribed; and that my only ſolid hopes for the well-being of my country depend not ſo much on her fleets and armies, not ſo much on the wiſdom of her rulers, or the ſpirit of her people, as on the perſuaſion that ſhe ſtill contains many, who, in a degenerate age, love and obey the Goſpel of Chriſt; on the humble truſt that the interceſſion of theſe may ſtill be prevalent, that for the ſake of theſe, Heaven may ſtill look upon us with an eye of favour.*

LET the prayers of the Chriſtian reader be alſo offered up for the ſucceſs of this feeble endeavour in the ſervice of true Religion. God can give effect to the weakeſt effort; and the writer will feel himſelf too much honoured, if by that which he has now been making, but a ſingle fellow-creature ſhould be awakened from a falſe ſecurity; or a ſingle Chriſtian, who deſerves the name, be animated to more extenſive uſefulneſs. He may ſeem to have aſſumed to himſelf a taſk which he was ill qualified to execute.

He

Digitized by Google

He fears he may be reproached with arrogance and preſumption for taking upon him the office of a teacher. Yet, as he formerly ſuggeſted, it cannot be denied, that it belongs to his public ſituation to inveſtigate the ſtate of the national Religion and Morals; and that it is the part of a real patriot to endeavour to retard their decline, and promote their revival. But if the office, in which he has been engaged, were leſs intimately connected with the duties of his particular ſtation, the candid and the liberal mind would not be indiſpoſed to pardon him. Let him be allowed to offer in his excuſe a deſire not only to diſcharge a duty to his country, but to acquit himſelf of what he deems a ſolemn and indiſpenſable obligation to his acquaintance and his friends. Let him allege the unaffected ſolicitude which he feels for the welfare of his fellow-creatures. Let him urge the fond wiſh he gladly would encourage; that, while, in ſo large a part of Europe, a falſe philoſophy having been preferred before the leſſons of revelation, Infidelity has lifted up her head without ſhame, and walked abroad boldly and in the face of day; while the practical conſequences are ſuch as might be expected, and licentiouſneſs and vice prevail without reſtraint: here at leaſt there might be a ſanctuary, a

SECT. IV.

Digitized by Google

CHAP. VII.

land of Religion and Piety, where the bleſſings of Chriſtianity might be ſtill enjoyed, where the name of the Redeemer might ſtill be honoured; where mankind might be able to ſee what is, in truth, the Religion of Jeſus, and what are its bleſſed effects; and whence, if the mercy of God ſhould ſo ordain it, the means of religious inſtruction and conſolation might be again extended to ſurrounding countries and to the world at large.

Digitized by Google

INDEX.

A.

ABUSE of things, unfairneſs of arguing from it againſt their uſe, 80.

Acceptance with God, commonly prevailing notions reſpecting it, 123—128.

— Scripture, and Church of England, doctrine reſpecting it, 129—134.

— practical conſequences of common notions reſpecting it, 129.

— true doctrine vindicated from objection, 135, 136.

Addiſon, quoted, 234.

Affections, of their admiſſion into Religion, 85, 86.

— their admiſſion into Religion reaſonable, 87—91.

— true teſt and meaſure of them in Religion, 92—96.

— in Religion, not barely allowable, but highly neceſſary, 97—101.

— our Saviour the juſt object of them, 102, 103.

— objection, that they are impoſſible towards an inviſible Being, diſcuſſed, 104—114.

— little excited by public misfortunes, and why, 111, 112.

— towards our Saviour, ſpecial grounds for them, 113, 114.

— divine aid promiſed for exciting them, 115, 116.

— our ſtatements reſpecting them in Religion verified by facts, 117, 119.

Digitized by Google

Affections, religious, St. Paul a ſtriking inſtance of them, 91.
Ambition, votaries of, 181, 182.
Amiable tempers, diſcuſſion reſpecting, 256—284.
— ſubſtituted for Religion, 256—258.
— value of, eſtimated by the ſtandard of mere reaſon, 259.
— falſe pretenders to them, 259.
— real nature, when not grounded on Religion, 260, 261.
— precarious nature, 261—264.
— value of, on Chriſtian principles, 267.
— life, Chriſtian's moſt ſo, 273, 274.
— Chriſtians urged to this, 275—282.
— its juſt praiſe, 282, 283.
— apt to deceive us, 284.
Applauſe, deſire of, univerſal, 211, 212.

B.

Babington, the reverend Matthew, 370.
Benevolence, true Chriſtian, its exalted nature, 408, 410.
Bacon, Lord, quoted, 327.

C.

Calumny, conſiderations which reconcile the Chriſtian to it, 243—245.
Charity, true, what, and its marks, 443, 444.
Chriſtianity, vital revival of, would invigorate church eſtabliſhment, 419.
— vital, alone ſuited to lower orders, 419, 420.
— the common ſyſtem, falſely ſo called, 434.
— the trueſt patriotiſm, 409—416.
— of the world, its baſe nature, 460.
— not a gloomy ſervice, 463—471.
— relaxations compatible with, 464—466.

Digitized by Google

Chriſtianity, its ſolid texture, 471, 472.
— general, what ſo called, 473—476.
— true, requires inceſſant watchfulneſs and care, 477.
— ſtate in which it finds us, 47—52.
— its preſent critical circumſtances, 379—389.
— reduced to a ſyſtem of ethics, proofs of this, 389. 395, 396.
— cauſes, which have tended to produce neglect of her peculiar doctrines, 384, 385. 391—393.
— peculiar doctrines of, taught by the oldeſt divines and higheſt dignitaries of the Engliſh church, 390. 391.
— peculiar doctrines gradually fallen into neglect, 394—396.
— ſad ſymptoms of its low ſtate among us, 396—399.
— objection, that our ſyſtem of it too ſtrict, ſtated and anſwered, 399—403.
— vital, its happy influence on temporal well-being of communities, 403—405.
— not hoſtile to patriotiſm, 406—408.
— from its eſſential nature, peculiarly adapted to well-being of communities, 412—416.
— vital, can alone produce theſe effects, 416.
— excellence of it, in ſome particulars not commonly noticed, 360—371.
— general ſtate of, in England, 375.
— its tendency to promote the well-being of political communities, 375. 409. 415, 416.
— has raiſed the general ſtandard of practice, 378, 379.
— ſickens in proſperity and flouriſhes under perſecution, 380—383.
— peculiarities of, naturally ſlide into diſuſe, 384.
Chriſtians, true, duties eſpecially incumbent on them in theſe times, 496—500.
— ſhould pray for their country, 498.

Digitized by Google

Christians, their prayers intreated for the success of this work, 500.
— ready made, who esteemed such, 451.
— real, how different from nominal, 307—309.
— life, illustrated by figure of a traveller, 311—313.
Common, House of, proves inordinate love of worldly glory, 228, 229.
Consistency between Christianity's leading doctrines and practical precepts, 331—359. 361.
— between Christianity's leading doctrines amongst each other, 361.
— between Christianity's practical precepts amongst each other, 362—367.
Contest, necessary to produce any interest in our affections, 107—114. 118.
Corruption of human nature, common notions of it, 26—28.
— of human nature, Scripture account of it, 29. 43, 44.
— of human nature, arguments suggested in proof of it, 29—43.
— of Heathen world, and striking instance of it, 31, 32.
— of savage life, 33, 34.
— proof of it, furnished by the state of the Christian world, 34—38.
— by the experience of the true Christian, 39, 40.
— human, its general effects, when suffered to operate without restraint, 41, 42.
— human, firm grounds on which it rests, 54.
— human, practical uses of the doctrine, 55.
Cowper's Task, recommended, 334. 499.
— quoted, 358.

D.

Defective, conceptions generally prevailing concerning importance of Christianity, 7—12.
— conceptions concerning human corruption, 27, 28.
— conceptions concerning the evil spirit, 45.

Digitized by Google

Defective conceptions concerning the doctrines, which respect our Saviour and the Holy Spirit, 68—70. 72. 74—76.
— conceptions concerning the means of acceptance with God, 122—133.
— conceptions prevailing concerning practical Christianity, 148—152. 169—294.
— conceptions of guilt and evil of sin, 295—301.
— fear of God, 301.
— sense of the difficulty of getting to heaven, 306—308.
— love of God in nominal Christians, 314—316.
— love of God, proofs of it in nominal Christians, 317—321.
— conceptions general, concerning peculiar doctrines of Christianity, 331.
— conceptions of peculiarities of Christianity, practical mischiefs from them, 332.
Depths, of the things of God; and our proneness to plunge into them, 63—65.
Devotedness to God, duty of it, 154—160. 164. 169. 171.
Dissipated and indolent, class of, 176, 177.
Dissipation, seems to have prevailed in the antediluvian world, 305.
Doddridge's Sermons on Regeneration, referred to, note, 121.
Duelling, its guilt, &c. 229, 230.

E.

Error, innocence of, considered, 19—23.
Establishment, religious, in England, how circumstanced, 381.
Estimation, desire of, universal, 211, 212.
— common language concerning it, the effects of the love of it, and the nature of the passion, 213—217.
— commendations of it questioned, 217, 218.
— essential defects of inordinate love of it, explained, 219, 220.

Digitized by Google

Eſtimation, love of, Scripture leſſons concerning, 220—225.
— value of, analogous to riches, 225.
— love of, common notions reſpecting it, 226, 227.
— proofs of our ſtatements reſpecting it from Houſe of Commons, 228.
— proofs of our ſtatements reſpecting it from duelling, 229—231.
— real nature of inordinate love of it, 233—235.
— true Chriſtian's conduct reſpecting love of it, 235—240.
— true modes of guarding againſt exceſſive love of it, 245, 246.
— advice to the true Chriſtian reſpecting love of it, 251—255.
— love of, beſt moderated by humility and charity, 253.
— true Chriſtian's temper reſpecting it, 254.
Evil ſpirit, the exiſtence and agency not contrary to reaſon, 45—47.
External actions ſubſtituted for habits of mind, 195.

F.

Faith, Chriſtian's life, a life of, 198—200.
Families, two, the righteous and the wicked, 303, 304.
Ferguſon, the hiſtorian, 413.
Fuller's Calviniſm and Socinianiſm compared, 487.
Fundamental practical diſtinction between ſyſtems of nominal and real Chriſtians, 338, 339. 357, 358.

G.

General tone of morals, Chriſtianity has raiſed it, 150.
— eſtabliſhed by conſent in every country, 377, 378.
Geneva, the effect of theatres, 319.
Gloomy ſervice, falſe charge that we make Chriſtianity ſuch, 463.
Glory, true and falſe, what properly ſo called, 220.
— Miſtakes concerning it, 219.
Good hearted young men, term miſapplied, 440.

Digitized by Google

Good hearted young men, the title disproved, 447.
Gratitude, true signs of, 73, 74.

H.

Habits, of mind forgotten in Religion, 195—211.
Heavenly mindedness, best promoted by being much conversant with peculiar doctrines of Christianity, 356.
Holy Spirit, Scripture doctrine concerning, 67. 120—122.
— popular notions concerning, 77—79.
Honour, false notions respecting it, 234, 235.
Horne, Dr. quoted, 91.
Humility, best enforced by peculiar doctrines of Christianity, 348—350.
— the ground of Christian graces, 210.
— excellent practical effects of, 253.

I

Ignorance of Christianity, common, 12, 13.
— criminal, 14, 15.
Importance of Christianity, inadequate conceptions generally entertained of it, 7—25.
— of Christianity, proofs of the inadequate ideas generally entertained of it, 8—12.
— of Christianity, ideas of it given by the Holy Scriptures, 16—20.
— of Christianity, best enforced by peculiar doctrines of Christianity, 342.
Inconsistency of world's practical system, 364, 365.
Indifference about Christianity generally prevalent, 18, 19.
— general towards our Saviour, proofs of, 70—72.
Infidelity, common progress of it, 479—485.
— a disease of the heart more than of the understanding, 485.
Innocent young women, term how misapplied, 440.
— young women, the title disproved, 447.
Intellectual attainments, rated below moral by Christianity, 367—371.
— low degree of excellence within our reach, 369.

Jones,

Digitized by Google

J.

Jones, Sir William, a champion for Christianity, 493.

K.

Kenyon, Lord Chief Justice, commendations of, 429.

L.

Language, common, concerning the importance of Christianity, 12.
— concerning human corruption, 27, 28.
— concerning affections towards our Saviour, and Holy Spirit's operations, 76—79.
— concerning terms of acceptance with God, 124—127.
— concerning mode of relaxing the strictness of Christian precept, 191—193.
— concerning human judicatures, 193.
— concerning amiable tempers and useful lives, 257.
— common to people desirous of repenting, 335, 336.
Learning, votaries of, 183, 184.
Life, Christian, illustrated under figure of a traveller, 311—313.
— Christian's, a life of faith, 198—204.
Liturgy, bad effects to be feared from its disuse, 422.
Lives, several mentioned, 477.
Love, true signs of it, 70, 71.
— of God, its essential characters, 159.
— of Christ, justly to be expected of us, 102, 103. 113, 114.
— means of exciting it, 143, 144.
— of God, defective in nominal Christians, 314, 315.
— of God, proofs of its being defective, 316—320.
— of fellow-creatures, nominal Christians defective in, 321, 322.
— of fellow-creatures, true marks of, 323—328.
— of God, best enforced by Christianity's peculiarities, 345.
— Christians to cultivate this grace above all others, 459.

Love,

Digitized by Google

Love, its excellent effects in the true Chriſtian, 461.
— of fellow-creatures beſt enforced by peculiar doctrines, 347, 348.
Low ſtandard of practice generally prevailing, 148, 149. 170—195.
Lower claſſes, not unfit that true doctrine of acceptance ſhould be ſtated to them, 135, 136.

M.

M'Laurin, his eſſays and ſermons referred to, 121. 141.
Maurice, Mr. a defender of Chriſtianity, 493.
Maxims, which prove human corruption, 36.
Medium, religious, almoſt loſt, 188.
Milton, quoted, 65.
Moral, attainments rated above intellectual, by Chriſtianity, 367.
— attainments, how much more we can excel in them than in intellectual ones, 369, 370.
Moravians, commendation of, 84.

N.

Natural condition of man without Chriſtianity, 48—52.
Nature, eſſential, of true practical Chriſtianity, 187.
Neceſſity, excuſe on the plea of, ſtated, and anſwered, 56—63.
— opponent on the ground of, how beſt oppoſed, 57, 58.
Nominal and real Chriſtian, diſtinction between them moſt important, 434.
Novels, prove how peculiarities of Chriſtianity have fallen into neglect, 394—396.

O.

Objections againſt the religious affections towards Chriſt, and againſt the operations of the Holy Spirit, 76—80.
— againſt human accountableneſs, diſcuſſed, 56—65.
— againſt the religious affections towards Chriſt, and againſt the operations of the Holy Spirit, diſcuſſed, 79—122.

Outgrowing

Digitized by Google

Outgrowing vices miſtaken for forſaking them, 438. 452.
Owen, Dr. referred to, 381. 392.

P.

Paley, Mr. his defence of Chriſtianity noticed, 372, 400.
Partiality in the religious views of nominal Chriſtians, 172—176.
Particular, Chriſtians muſt not fear to be ſo when required by duty, 240.
Paſcal's thoughts referred to, 350.
— thoughts recommended, 494.
Peculiar, doctrines, uſe, in promoting humility, 348—350.
— in promoting moderation in earthly purſuits, 351.
— in promoting cheerfulneſs in ſuffering, 352, 353.
— in promoting confidence in danger, and patience in ſuffering, 353, 354.
— in promoting heavenly mindedneſs, 356.
— doctrines, demand our utmoſt attention, 137—141.
— doctrines, uſe of, 341.
— doctrines, uſe of, in enforcing importance of Chriſtianity, 342.
— doctrines, uſe of, in enforcing entire ſurrender to God, 343.
— doctrines, uſe of, in enforcing guilt of ſin, and dread of puniſhment, 343, 344.
— in promoting love of God, 345, 346.
— in promoting love of fellow-creatures, 347, 348.
Philoſophy, epicuriſm and ſtoiciſm, 88.
Pleaſure, the true Chriſtian finds in Religion, 201—203.
Pleaſures of true Religion, 461—471.
Policy, miſtaken, of compromiſe with immorality, 427, 428.
Poliſhed ſtate of ſociety no ſecurity againſt progreſs of immorality, 424, 425.
Political, good effects from the prevalence of Chriſtianity, as above deſcribed, 403—420.
— good effects from revival of vital Chriſtianity, 421.
— bad effects from its farther decline, 422—424.

Political,

Digitized by Google

Political, happineſs of a Chriſtian nation, 404, 405.
Pomp and parade, votaries of, 181.
Poor the, more favourably circumſtanced as to Religion, 136. 416.
Pope, the Poet, referred to, 351.
Popular notions concerning our Saviour and the Holy Spirit, 70—72.
Practical hints, on importance of Chriſtianity, 24, 25.
— on human corruption, 56, 57.
— on mode of dealing with a certain deſcription of infidels, 57, 58.
— on the means of exciting our affections towards our Saviour, 143, 144.
— reſpecting love of eſtimation, 250—255.
— reſpecting amiable tempers and uſeful lives, 275.
— to naturally ſweet tempered, 276.
— to naturally rough and auſtere, 277—285.
— to true Chriſtian, when engaged in hurry of worldly affairs, 285—292.
— to perſons deſirous of repenting, 335, 336.
— reſpecting uſes of peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity, 342—358.
— for revival of Religion, 426—431.
— to various deſcriptions, 434—451.
— to ſuch as, having been hitherto careleſs, wiſh to become true Chriſtians, 452—471.
— to ſome who profeſs their full aſſent to fundamental doctrines of Chriſtianity, 472—478.
— to Sceptics and Unitarians, 478—490.
— to half-unbelievers, 490—494.
— to true Chriſtians, from ſtate of times, 495—502.
— Chriſtianity, chapter on, 140—359.
— prevailing low views of it, 148—150.
— Chriſtianity, its real ſtrictneſs, 152, 153.
— its true nature, 155—160.
— charged on all without exception in its full ſtrictneſs, 161—167.

Digitized by Google

Practical miſchiefs of neglect of peculiarities of Chriſtianity, 332,
— diſtinction, fundamental, between ſyſtems of nominal and real Chriſtians, 331—335.
— precepts of Chriſtianity, moſt excellent, 371.
— uſe of peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity, 339.
Prevailing, low views of practical Chriſtianity, proofs of them, 150.
— inadequate ſenſe of peculiar doctrines of Chriſtians, 331, &c.
Probation, notion of diſproves prevailing ſyſtem of Religion, 350, 351.
Proof of Chriſtianity's divine origin, 372—374.
Puritans, many of their writings commended, 399.

R.

Religion, practical hints for its revival, 426, 433.
— the only true ſupport in trouble and peril, 471.
Repentance, advice for ſuch as are diſpoſed to, 452—460.
Reputation, true Chriſtian's conduct reſpecting it, 235—255
— true Chriſtian preſerves, without over-valuing it, 239—244.
Richardſon, mentioned, 396.
Robertſon, Dr. cenſured, 397
Roſſeau, ſchool of, 293—295.

S.

Scepticiſm, natural hiſtory of it, 479—482.
Sceptics and Unitarians, advantage they have in attacking Chriſtianity, 488—489.
Scripture doctrine, importance of, to Chriſtianity, 16—19.
— doctrine, concerning human corruption, 26—14.
— doctrine, concerning Chriſt and the Holy Spirit, 66, 67.
Self-deception, frequent ſources of, 435—452.
— another common kind, 472—476.
Self-examination, helps in, 435.
Selfiſhneſs of common practical Religion, 176—184.
— the diſeaſe of political ſocieties, 409.
— peculiarly counteracted by Chriſtianity, 413—416.

Senſibility,

Digitized by Google

Senſibility, exquiſite, how little truly valuable, and how different from true practical benevolence, 293—295.
Senſualiſts, claſs of, 179.
Sin, how ſpoken of in Scripture, 302.
— defective conceptions of, 296.
Sincerity, falſe notion of it, 20—23.
— true what, 24, 25.
Sins, no little ones, 300—303.
— little, what accounted ſuch, 299
Smith, Dr. *Adam*, 111. 270. 273. 398.
Soame Jenyns, his View of the Internal Evidence of Chriſtianity referred to, 13. 400.
Sophiſtry, with which Religion is explained away, 193.
Stage the, proof from its being frequented by nominal Chriſtians of their defective love of God, 317—320. 328—330.
— proof from, illuſtrated by political analogy, 320.
Statutes, Religion made a ſet of, 190, 191.
Sterne ſtrongly cenſured, 294.
Strictneſs of true practical Chriſtianity, 152, 154.
— of our ſyſtem, objected to, as not ſuited to the ſtate of the world, 399.
— the charge refuted, 400, &c.
Sunday, hints for its employment, 203—205.
— common modes of unhallowing it, 206—209.
Supreme regard to be ſet on God, 89. 163—187.
Swift's Tale of a Tub, quoted, 192.

T.

Taſte, votaries of, 184.
Tempers, Chriſtian, not cultivated, 197. 210.
— reſpecting human eſtimation, 237—241.
— reſpecting calumny and diſgrace, 243, 244.
— when too much immerſed in worldly buſineſs, 287—292.
Theatres, Pariſian, 319.
Theatrical entertainments prove defective love of God, 318.

Theatrical

Digitized by Google

Theatrical, prove defective love of our neighbour, 329—330.
— entertainments, illuſtrated by political analogy, 330.

V.

Vice, ſome one always excuſed, 338. 441.
Vices, out-growing or changing them, miſtaken for forſaking all ſin, 438—440.
Vulgarity in Religion, as to language, to be expected from vulgar men, 83, 84.

U.

Unbelievers, *half*; a claſs of them, 490.
Uncharitableneſs, what falſely ſo called, 443, 444.
Unitarianiſm often reſults from ſame cauſes as abſolute ſcepticiſm, 486.
Uſeful lives, diſcuſſion concerning, 256.
— ſubſtituted for Religion, 257.
— value of, eſtimated by ſtandard of mere reaſon, 265, 266.
— real worth of, on Chriſtian principles, 267—270.
— life, the Chriſtians life the moſt ſo, 273.
— Chriſtians urged to, 275.
— its juſt praiſe given to, 282.
— apt to miſlead us, 284.

W.

Wealth, votaries of, 181, 182.
Women, more diſpoſed than men to Religion, and uſes to be made of this, 445.
— exalted office aſſigned to them, 446.
Witherſpoon, 392.

Y.

Youth, ſimplicity of, miſtaken for Religion, 444.

FINIS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google